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**Representing the Outside: Cinema, Mass Culture,  
History and the Public Sphere in Italy**

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## **Representing the Outside: Cinema, Mass Culture, History and the Public Sphere in Italy**

PierPaolo Sarraam

### Abstract

The study of the history of Italian film is structured by the absence of an acknowledgment of the country's "popular" cinema. When it is contemplated it is generally marginalized, as historiographic discourses and interpretative practices prefer to cluster around those films which provide stronger symbolic capital for the nation's culture industry in the international market while serving, simultaneously, as important discourses which structure cultural --and production-- relations domestically. Arguing for a valorization of these films and the production and exhibition practices that accompanied them --against the common perception of them as hollow mindless product which needs to be bracketed off from the culturally

sanctioned cinema of the great directors of the post-war period-- I offer a contextual and materialist interrogation of these practices and texts, suggesting a different historiographic approach and the need for different theories of cultural production, consumption and modes of spectatorship within a national cinema which will take into consideration those differences tied to class, gender and locality.

Analyzing the effects of post-war reconstruction and the traumatic experience of a forced modernization --the shocks to a public which was essentially other and in all manners invisible to social, economic and cultural interventions-- the research wishes to interrogate the various dynamics which inform the circulation and consumption of those silenced --and in many ways autonomous-- forms of popular cinematic practices which evade the institutionally sanctioned national discourse surrounding Italian cinema. By looking at the contradictory ways in which these films were received by the public, the state and by the critics I undertake a combination of textual and industrial analysis in order to reflect on the hidden

desire --which subtend the unconditioned reflexes which have accompanied the stigmatization of the popular genres-- of maintaining certain social and cultural hierarchies intact.

Mapping out popular film production --understood as a practice underpinned by a different set of values, concerns, embodiments, and expressive forms which concerned themselves with spectacle, the physical body, farce, parody, melodrama, action, abjection, horror and obscenity and their development in a system of genres (thrillers, horrors, sex-comedies, westerns and the historical epics set in ancient Rome known as peplums)-- and the modes of exhibition which accompanied them, the potential of the popular genres resides in their ability to oppose that institutional national culture which finds the necessity to continuously defend itself from the “low” end of a cultural hierarchy in order to reproduce its own legitimacy.

In fact, the popular genres in Italy, which developed at the juncture where industrialization, urbanization, nationalization and the restructuring of class relations intersected during a particular historical period (1958-1978), appealed to audiences which can be constructed as

heterogeneous elements within productive society and which constitute, through their apparent absence from the frames of the national imagination, the “low” of a hierarchical dichotomy which structures discourses of artistic practices and the construction of cultural canons of national representation. As evidenced by the exhibition circuits to which the popular genres were aimed at, the deployment of this opposition of high and low in the cultural sphere is reaffirmed and reproduced both through the opposition of the high/low organization of the cities themselves --as these came to be inhabited by the displaced masses of the internal migration which followed the processes of modernization and which constituted the main public for the genre films-- and through the consequent high/low dichotomy in the opportunities for democratic participation, where the divisions reinforced other kinds of separations like those between social classes, regional types or between gendered positions. The deployment of this opposition of high and low not only in artistic practices but also as evidenced in the urban topography of the spaces of representation and reception offers a variety of angles of

inquiry into the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion which structure the development of a national culture in general and a national cinema in particular, and the possibilities of putting into place alternative modes for the production and consumption of symbols of collective identity. It also points to the possibilities of political and cultural change which arise in those instances where the high and low interpenetrate one another's fields, revealing how the differentiation of each is structured and dependent upon the other and how that opposition recurs in a variety of symbolic and material domains.

### Significance of the Project

This dissertation, placing itself at the intersection of cultural criticism and social history, makes a contribution to the critical analysis of national media, to the relations between the processes of nationalization and popular and mass culture, film historiography in general and Italian film

history in particular and the discursive constructions of cultural value.

Post-war Italy represents a particularly appropriate field of inquiry into important areas of the above disciplines and dynamics, since the tensions between the inclusions and exclusions inherent in processes of constructing a national culture and the related setting up of high/low divisions in cultural value are rendered particularly evident by the contradictory and uneven processes of modernization that occurred in Italy during its bid to transform itself into a modern and efficient capitalist state. Because of the contradictory hegemonic (and yet, coextensive) grip of the Church and Marxism in political and cultural matters and the uneasy coexistence of mass culture and consumerism with both traditional and more politically progressive understandings of popular culture and the consequent strategies of employing these in the nationalizing efforts of the state, the post-war period, and more specifically the twenty years that separate the so-called “economic miracle” of the late fifties and the opening up of the state’s hold on cultural matters in the late seventies --with all of the social,



cultural and economic tensions that accompanied this period (the first center-left governments, the student and worker revolts of 1968 and 1977, the period of armed struggle, the liberalization of the airwaves, etc.)-- represent a limit and yet exemplary case for testing consolidated understandings of the role of national media as organizer of collectivities and identities.

Specifically in relation to film studies, this has been evidenced by an interest in studying the nationalization of the film industry or an examination of the notion of “national identity” as it emerges through films. However, discussions about the cinematic constitution of Italian national identity have neglected to analyze the role of popular genres in their specificity and how such an analysis might point towards a rearticulation of what has meant to be “Italian” and to how that might be in contradiction with the homogeneous identity which has up to now been theorized. Furthermore, the history of Italian film has been written in a manner that treats the film industry’s economic and cultural struggle with Hollywood as its central determining feature. This narrative in fact, once one takes

into account the irreducible otherness of the popular genres, excludes the fact that the (re)construction of the post-war republic's film industry and national cinema coincided with radical transformations in modes of production and consumption which accompanied the larger societal transformation of Italy from an agrarian nation into a fully industrialized one. Paradoxically, one of the key factors shaping the film industry and the discourses surrounding the construction of a national cinema was not the necessity of constructing and producing audiences (or attracting these away from the onslaught of Hollywood films which invaded the market at the end of the war) but rather the anxiety surrounding the potentially subversive viewership of the newly acquired audiences of the urban centers.

While the study of the Italian national cinema (and European cinemas in general) focuses on Hollywood's role as the formative alter-ego of Italian films, there has been no acknowledgment of the active structuring role that the "otherness", the difference(s) and the absence of the "new" audiences from the national frame of intersubjectivity have

had in defining what is recognized as Italian cinema. An acknowledgment of these dynamics is necessary for an engagement of the idea that by the late fifties, Italy was both a culturally “colonized” nation in terms of its film industry and actively producing internally colonizing cultural policies and discourses aimed at excluding and silencing alternative understandings of its identities as these were actualized in the genre films. Investigating at the textual level these silenced popular genres in conjunction with an investigation of the industrial strategies which actively produced and distributed them towards the new urban audiences and by taking into consideration the different spectatorial addresses embedded in the films themselves presents itself as a privileged operation in order to engage these under-analyzed dynamics.

My larger research project, of which this dissertation is a part, will include a wider look at other media and other pop culture artifacts (pop music, tabloid magazines, fan culture, photo-novels, comic books, local television) and their production, dissemination and reception within the wider cultural context of post-war Italy in particular and

other European nations in general. Such an operation seems all the more pressing in light of the process of European unification and the strategies of cultural policy that are being enacted which seem poised to repeat the same operations of power and silencing on a much wider scale. Furthermore I am interested in the reception of the popular genres of Italian cinema in the US and other markets in order to analyze the different dynamics which subtend their circulation and reception.

Ultimately the work is an attempt at offering an initial rethinking of the construction of cultural values within national contexts and analyze the dynamics which underline the creation of cultural hierarchies and ideological discourses, the representation of history and the formation of the public sphere.

## CHAPTER 1

**“A state, is called the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly lieth it also; and this lie creepeth from its mouth: ‘I, the state, am the people.’...Everything will it give you, if ye worship it, the new idol: thus it purchaseth the lustre of your virtue, and the glance of your proud eyes...Better break the windows and jump into the open air!...There, where the state ceaseth...there commenceth the song of the necessary ones...”**

**-Friedrich Nietzsche**

The study of the history of Italian film is structured by the glaring absence of an acknowledgement on the country’s “popular” cinema. When it is contemplated, it is generally marginalized, its practice considered despicable, as

discourses prefer to cluster around the often élitary but critically acclaimed art film/auteur traditions with which film history has been accustomed in identifying European film production in general. In Italy, these traditions, which provide stronger symbolic capital for the nation's culture industry in the international market, also serve as important discourses which structure cultural (and capital) power relations domestically, within the space of the nation, as they come to be used for the construction of a unitary and universal model of national subjectivity. The cinema has in fact often been theorized and historicized as one of the fundamental networks of social communication which, according to Karl Deutsch, form the basis of the construction of the nation-state and the sentiments of nationalism<sup>1</sup>.

The following wishes to propose an analysis of the various dynamics which inform the circulation and consumption of these silenced forms of cinematic practices and offer a way of bringing out to the light, and out of oblivion, those lost histories interred beneath the foundations of ever taller monuments to national discourse

and international capitalist success. An investigation of the spaces of exhibition and the modes of spectatorship developed at the juncture where industrialization, urbanization, nationalism, the restructuring (and institutionalization) of class relations and subjectivities intersect in ever ambivalent dialectical engagements offers different perspectives on historicizing and theorizing the construction of the national subject and the subsumption of difference in the name of the universalizing thrust of the bourgeois project and capitalism. The ambitions of the discourses surrounding Italian film historiography and the interpretative practices advanced within them amounts to a definable operation of power, where “real” Italian film becomes significant as one set of practices rather than others, as the stasis of the “national” replaces the theoretically (and politically) more productive conception of a temporal process such as “nationalizing”.

In fact, although capitalism has been discussed and theorized as promoting an ever increasing process of deterritorialization<sup>2</sup>, structured as it is in not calling upon any belief, any type of sacred truth in order to function, the

project of nationalism cannot be discerned from the greater development of the system of relations produced by capitalist strategy and framed within the greater projects of industrialization and modernization. As Marshall Berman notes, “modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.”<sup>3</sup> According to Berman, the project of modernity may be understood as an attempt of making “oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom.”<sup>4</sup> Nationalism, while entering on the historical scene as one of the fundamental manners in which the “maelstrom” of modernity could be domesticated, offering as it does a definite conception of “home” and locality -even if, as Benedict Anderson so aptly demonstrated, merely imagined<sup>5</sup> - nonetheless participated in its very development, while at the same time being itself a product of the process of capitalist industrial development.

The disappearance of the old rituals, ceremonies and all other “respected” forms which were once considered sacred, perpetrated by the general decodification of the



project of modernity fostered by capitalist relations of production -a decodification not merely intended as a linguistic operation but more generally investing the manners in which societies regulate production, including, and maybe most importantly, its social and desiring production- accompanied a reduction of all social relations to commodity relations of universal equivalency -at least within the geopolitical and cultural borders of the nation-state. The process deterritorialized desire by subverting the traditional codes that limited and controlled social relations of/and production, such as family, class structures, religious beliefs, traditions, kinship systems and patterns of social organization.

While this process is reaching its apex in our present cultural and economic conjuncture of diffused globalization, as capitalism's incessant push to deterritorialize has even managed to reduce the centrality of the nation-state and the ideology of nationalism as a "vector of historical development"<sup>6</sup> -slandering the central Marxist tenet that capitalism's laws of motion, even while constantly pulverizing the cultural and material basis of all limited

forms of membership and conditions of existence (locality, nationality, religion) were supposed to incessantly recreate the bases of solidarity and hegemony of the dominant class (the bourgeoisie) and the social organization of the relations of production produced by the system- at precise instances of its historical development the project of nationalism simultaneously reterritorialized desire and subjectivity by channeling all production into the narrow confines of a general equivalence, namely in the production of the “national subject”. The project of nationalism, therefore, must be first and foremost, seen as the coming together of determinate historical forces, while participating in the dialectic of class struggle. The nation provided the “space” for the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, as part of the bourgeois ideology of “moving forward” towards a collective future; a structural enactment of the division of labor inherent in industrialization in its constant striving to hide the material basis of class relations and the dialectics of class struggle, while subsuming differences and processes of differentiation, simultaneously de-structuring and re-structuring regional/local and urban/rural spaces. As

James Hay writes, citing the work of Monroe Spears, an integral part of this process of deterritorialization is the “arrival of Dionysus in the City” as it reconfigures the subjective relation of the classes with the “changing nature of myth.”

The loss of territory which accompanies the inexorable push of modernity forces the individual to find in the “metaphysical loss of home” the correlate of the nomadic, “migratory character of his experience of society and of self.” Berman’s contention is that being modern is “to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world -and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.”

As Miriam Hansen notes in regards to the polymorphic nature of early cinema representation and reception, “audiences were as varied as the contexts in which films were originally shown.”<sup>7</sup> Like the process of putting into place of the institutional mode of representation and the industrial organization of the film industry in the early years of the twentieth century in the United States, the workings of the discourses surrounding the production, regulation and construction of the national subject in the practice and historical theorizing of Italian cinema in the post-world war two years moved to gentrify the previous popular conception of audiences and their constitution as diverse and heterogenous. If, as Hansen recognizes, “the industry’s gentrification efforts were designed to elevate motion picture audiences to the level of the upwardly mobile mass public of mainstream commercial entertainments”<sup>8</sup>, thus constituting a nation of consumers, the nationalist discourse of Italian

cinema pushed to create a nation of citizens and pressed for the creation of a more comprehensive, less class-specific and even less localized conception of the public.

Andrew Higson notes how the concept of national cinema has almost invariably been mobilized “as a strategy of cultural (and economic) resistance; a means of asserting national autonomy in the face of (usually) Hollywood’s international domination.”<sup>9</sup> Following Benedict Anderson’s argument on the impossibility of imagining nations “except in the midst of an irremediable plurality of other nations”<sup>10</sup>, Higson premises the definition of national cinema on the semiotic principle of the production of meaning and identity through difference. “The task is to try to establish the identity of one national cinema by its relationship to and differentiation from other national cinemas.”<sup>11</sup> As a consequence the definitions of national cinemas always involve the construction of an “imaginary homogeneity of identity and culture [...] apparently shared by all subjects.” A process of inclusion/exclusion where one definition of “Italian” -in the case of Italy- is centralized and others are

marginalized in a process which Higson refers to as one of “internal cultural colonialism.”<sup>12</sup>

One of the manners in which this “internal colonialism”, which affected much more than the cultural sphere as it informed the whole process of industrialization and modernization of the Italian peninsula, deployed itself was through the various articulations of the city and the rise in urban migration, both from the rural areas of the south and an internal migration of shifting populations within the geography of the city itself. One might say that since the unification of Italy in 1861 up to the present day the administrative policies of Italian cities have demonstrated, behind a facade of apparent lack of programs, an urban planning scheme which can be defined as pointing to forms of social segregation.

The development of the “borgate”<sup>13</sup> in a city like Rome, which saw its population practically double between 1951 and 1964<sup>14</sup>, was tied to the efforts of the national post-war government of creating pools of labor in the urban centers to be used in the modernizing and industrializing processes that accompanied the economic boom of the early fifties. A

large number of people from the economically depressed areas of the country -areas which were politically pushing for a rapid conversion from their mainly agrarian economy to a fully industrialized one- were encouraged to migrate to the cities with the promise of work and salary only to find the administrations incapable of guaranteeing either work or pay, finding themselves struggling to cope with the new realities of modern life in precarious living conditions.

The development of the urban configuration of Rome followed Quintino Sella's prescriptions.<sup>15</sup> Typically popular settlements were barred from being developed within the urban center of the city. As these developed in the degraded peripheries, with the national administration providing minimally for the infrastructural services and only when the requests for an amelioration of living conditions started to pose "serious threats" for the unity of the nation<sup>16</sup>, a large pocket of residual culture of the pre-modern era, relegated outside the relations of production, outside processes of representation and outside of national discourse was produced. As Harvey writes of the consequences on urban configurations following rapid growth and massive

immigration of rural labor, the “concentration of wealth and power proceeded apace as the cities became the centers of financial, speculative and commercial operations (centers of industry). The contrasts between affluence and poverty became ever more startling and were increasingly expressed in terms of a geographical segregation between the bourgeois quarters...and the working class quarters.” The new settled areas “became a foreign territory into which the bourgeois citizens rarely dare to venture. The population of that place, which more than doubled...was pictured in the bourgeois press as the “dregs of the people” caught “in the deepest depths of poverty and hatred” where “ferments of envy, sloth and anger bubble without cease.”<sup>17</sup> In this regard Italo Insolera notes how the borgate were created “from the complete lack of a definite relationship of economic participation. Any type of action that had been advocated for the solution of the problems associated with the borgate had not escaped the logic of ultimately resolving itself as a simple request of their disappearance.”<sup>18</sup>



If the power of the idea of the nation concerns the involvement of “people” in a “common sense of identity and its capacity to work as an inclusive symbol which provides ‘integration’ and ‘meaning’”<sup>19</sup> the exclusion of the popular inhabitants of the borgate provided disintegration and insignificance in the discourses surrounding them. Their absence from the frames of bourgeois intersubjectivity and the particular weight of the political difference between the culturally dominant and subordinate which was enacted in this dialectical relation can easily be read as an establishment of the high/low dichotomy that necessarily occupies the discourses of artistic practice and the constructions of cultural canons of national representation and reception. The deployment of this opposition of high and low not only in artistic practices but also as evidenced in the urban topography of the spaces of representation and reception offers a variety of angles of inquiry into the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and the possibilities of putting into place alternative modes for the production and consumption of symbols of collective identity.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have suggested that “the fear of differences that have no law, no meaning and no end was articulated above all through the body of the city: through the separations and interpenetrations of the suburb and the slum, of grand buildings and the sewer, of the respectable classes and the lumpenproletariat.”<sup>20</sup> The opposition of the high and low of culture and the high and low of the body is reaffirmed and strengthened through the opposition of high and low in the hierarchal organization of the city.

The context of exhibition and the spectatorial modes that are addressed by the popular Italian cinema is emblematic of these relations as they provide the locus for the intersection of discourses surrounding the high/low dichotomy of the national/local, urban/rural, cultural/natural, subjective/objective.

The spaces and contexts of film exhibition as they developed in this framework of social relations is quite distant from the “proper” manner in which the universalized prescription of a bourgeois “mode” of spectatorship -those spaces “where issues must be discussed intellectually”- is

codified. The theaters and sites of film consumption in the borgate and the other areas still tied to locality point to those articulations of spaces that Foucault called “heterotopias.”<sup>21</sup> As spaces offering a “sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of [social] space”, the sites of exhibition become as a reflection of their placement within the topography of the city, as expressions of flows of capital through the geographical landscape of capitalism, “crisis heterotopias [...] forbidden [or privileged] places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society [...] in a state of crisis”<sup>22</sup>, outside of the relations of production, outside of the official discursive construction of national culture as they escape historically determined “nationalizing”.

## CHAPTER 2

**“Hatred is something peculiar. You will always find it strongest and most violent where there is the lowest degree of culture.”  
--Goethe**

The following chapter wishes to accept James Hay's invitation to address the relationship of industrial capitalism to public culture and also to the growth of the urban commercial centers and the social classes which accompanied this growth for its discussion of both mass culture and popular cinema. By looking at these “symptoms” of social development and modernization -as Clifford Geertz has suggested --modern culture may be described in terms of ideological formations and social

rituals-- the implementation of belief and value systems which are both organized/unorganized, rational/irrational, material/occult.

Such a configuration is an open invitation to question the traditional understanding of the processes at the basis of the formation of cultural identities and question the existence of common cultures and the role of the mass media and mass culture more generally as one of the primary sites where such processes are set into motion and solidified. Philip Schlesinger clearly critiques naïve ideals of the primacy of the media in constructing identity, pushing his reflection in encompassing the ideas of ‘unity in diversity’ that are at the basis of projects of nation building particularly those that concern themselves with the role of culture and communication as key elements. The belief in the existence of a not better specified ‘common culture’ –the understanding that not only does a common culture exist despite difference (social, gender, ethnic, sexual) which is seen as merely superficial and epiphenomenal.

Schlesinger instead is quite clear in articulating the idea of common culture as an ‘artefact’ where the presumed

unity is in the process itself. In media affairs the idea of a common culture serves as a synonym for the construction of a smooth and conflict free ideological space as well as for the protection of domestic production and employment. In fact this alleged common culture has come about not through individuals, ideas, styles and values over the centuries but in virtue of violence and imperialist and pseudo-colonial expansion. Indeed the project of unity in diversity “distorts the issue up to a rewriting of history and the necessary recodification of social memory”.<sup>23</sup>

The rhetoric being refuted here then is that of a culture –even a mass culture—that is seen as a static object under attack or as something that is pre-assumed and its possibility rendered necessary. The existence of, for example, an Italian culture and of Italian values, is pre-assumed and the possibility of being able to intelligibly be spoken of is taken for granted. Culture, including mass culture –hidden as it is under the cloak of a discursive construction of inherent value is seen as a finished product (all the while as its ‘commodity status is negated and the nation from which these cultural artefacts issue is

understood as a stable given. The nation and national cultures then appear as articles of belief, produced from national cultures that are largely unproblematic and, while escaping description, existing.<sup>24</sup>

In this sense Armand Mattelart echoes Schlesinger when he urges us to not see and conceive of audiovisual space and socio-cultural identity as opposed or substitutable. The mass media's inherent tendency to nationalize social and cultural space and identities is often counteracted by the discursive nature of this same space and the cultural sphere enacted by the media demonstrates all of its potentiality for the reinforcement of older style territorially but also –and more fundamentally–alter-cultural and social based identities.<sup>25</sup>

It is then the nation-state that acts as a political roof (as a legitimator and defender) of the discursive conception of high culture and the cinema, as a social institution and social technology that historically has combated with its own status within the cultural hierarchy of artistic practices. serves –as we have seen and will further

discuss— as a flashpoint for these discourses, particularly in the post-war year in Europe in general and in Italy in particular, so ideally suited as it is to provide a literal ‘image’ for the nation particularly for one such as Italy in such a dire and desperate need to rebuild its projection to the outside and the inside.

Benedict Anderson stops short of explaining how the ideas that constructed the imagining(s) of the nation were then extended and rearticulated in being capable of shaping the way people and communities thought about themselves. His work is, nevertheless, a valuable study of the -mainly cultural- origin(s) of the concept of nationalism, which he sees as multiple and heterogeneous.<sup>26</sup>

If Anderson fails to fully account for the *how* of the imagining of the nation as an entity for which people were willing to “die for” (and that death can/should be understood here not only in the literal sense of the nation as founded on violence but also as a more allegorical death of previous identities and sense of belonging), his question, “what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal



sacrifices?"<sup>27</sup>, remains unsatisfactorily answered. His reflections on Ernest Renan's assertion that "the essence of a nation is that all of [its] individuals have many things in common, and also that all of them need to have forgotten many things"<sup>28</sup> and his echoing of Gellner's statement on nationalism as not being "the awakening of nations to self-consciousness", rather as it being an invention of "nations where they do not exist"<sup>29</sup> points to productive modes of reflecting on the question of the nation and national cultures. Anderson's main point is articulated in his critique of Gellner's use of the word "invention". According to Anderson, Gellner's use of the word implies that "nationalism masquerades under false pretences" and that "invention", in its coming to be assimilated to "fabrication" and "falsity" rather than to "imagining" and "creation", "implies that 'true' communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations." As Anderson writes, "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined"<sup>30</sup>, a stance which echoes Hobsbawm's call for an agnostic approach to the understanding of nations, but

which nevertheless does not push it far enough.<sup>31</sup> The emphasis on the "imagined" of the nation however makes Anderson's reflections useful in discussing the role of cinematic institutions and practices in constructing the national imaginary and literal image.

The cinema traces a path resulting in an identification of the nation as an imagined political community, its "powers" residing in its inherent contradictions and in the ways in which these contradictions are negotiated within its imagination. The nation negotiates its identity within its own imagination: it is imagined as *limited* ("even the largest of them...has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which other lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind...the most messianic of nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible in certain epochs"<sup>32</sup>; it is imagined as *sovereign* (as it came out of the legacies of the enlightenment and the French revolution which destroyed the "legitimacy of the divinely ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm"); it is

imagined as a *community* ("deep horizontal comradeship" regardless of the inequalities and exploitation that exists in each). And among the contradictions it incarnates, it is both old and new (the already mentioned contradictory relation it holds with modernity; the break it represents with historical continuity and narrative and the need to rebuild its own form of coherence, narrative, history, antiquity, and past) and both open and closed (open as it is possible to enter the community -Anderson cites this fact as one of the manners in which nationalism differentiates itself from the more ahistorical racist sentiments<sup>33</sup> - and closed, as it still needs to define itself against an "Other" which ultimately provides one of *the* basis of its identity; no matter as we will see whether that Other is external or internal).

Miroslav Hroch, from a political economic standpoint, attempts to investigate the diffusion of the ways in which national ideas occurred in specific social settings. It is this primary concern of his that differentiates his project from that of the other social scientists and historians that have attempted to tackle the problematic of the nation,

nationalism and national cultures. Rather than attempting to provide a theory, Hroch seeks to “develop effective methods for the classification and assessment of experiences of nation-building as a process set within a wider social and cultural history.”<sup>34</sup> His inquiry does attempt to overcome some of those limitations that others such as Anderson, Hobsbawm and Gellner have encountered when trying to come up with a general framework for discussing the problems associated with the nation.

According to Hroch “intellectuals can ‘invent’ national communities only if certain objective preconditions for the formation of a nation already exist.” In other words Hroch tackles Benedict Anderson’s supposed subjectivism in theorizing the nation by adding a further question to his characterization of the nation as an “imagined community”: namely, if the nation is willed, what are the conditions that make this “willing” possible?

Hroch’s project articulates itself through a series of points and distinctions which enable a more clear view of the terrain and the materials available for questioning to

someone wanting to analyze the processes of the national. The nation is not an “eternal category” but the “product of a long and complicated process of historical development.” As these processes articulated themselves through distinct stages and distinct outcomes, they resulted ultimately into a conception of potential nationhood and national cultures, which Hroch defines as “organized endeavors to achieve all the attributes of a fully-fledged nation” (and which he distinguishes from nationalism).

The goals of the national movements are identified by Hroch as: 1) the development of a national culture based on the local language, and its normal use in education, administration and economic life; 2) the achievement of civil rights and political self-administration, initially in the form of autonomy and ultimately (usually quite late, as an express demand) of independence; 3) the creation of a complete social structure from out of the ethnic group, including educated elites, an officialdom and an entrepreneurial class, but also -where necessary- free peasants and organized workers.

Hroch identifies three structural phases separating the initial emergence of the national movement from the successful reaching of its goal:

Phase A: the scholarly unearthing of persisting cultural expression; the pressing of specifically national demands is not necessary in this phase.

Phase B: an extension of the ideas uncovered in phase A and an attempt to give them more presence through the formulation and the adoption of a national idea and campaign; the use of pressing specifically national demands is used in order to win and stir patriotic agitation among members of the ethnic group being addressed.

Phase C: once the major part of the population start actively supporting the idea of nationhood, there is a formation of a mass movement which enables a “full social structure” to come into being. The social structure is then politicized and the movement differentiated.

Through this periodization Hroch is enabled to perform comparisons between national movements and “study the analogous forms and phases of historical development.” In doing so, and by anchoring some of the more significant aspects that would explain the modes and passages from one phase of building the national movement to the next - “the social profile and territorial distribution of leading patriots and activists; *the role of language as symbol and vehicle of identification; the place of the theater (also music and folklore) in national movements; the salience or otherwise civil rights as a demand; the importance of historical awareness; the position of the school system and the spread of literacy*; the participation of the churches and the influence of religion; the contribution of women as activists and symbols”<sup>35</sup>- Hroch overcomes the limitations inherent in other inquiries by explaining, within a political economic and historical materialist framework, the relationship between the transition from Phase B to Phase C, that is how the ‘imagining’ of the nation is then adopted and transformed into a mass movement and in “whose” interest this transition occurs. The reason for this is to evade the

“mere synchroni surveys of what was happening a the same time in different lands” (Hobsbawm) and to provide for the meaningful comparisons between the various national movements as they developed across historical periods (that is a comparative possibility of analyzing the various national movements in their own terms as they pass through the various phases.

Hroch, furthermore, demonstrates, through an inclusion of economic history, how the unavoidable social conflicts of interest are articulated in national terms and the power relations that such an articulation helps to maintain.

As Ernest Gellner writes in Nations and Nationalism, “culture is no longer merely the adornment, confirmation and legitimation of a social order which was also sustained by harsher and coercive constraints; culture is now the necessary share medium, the life-blood or perhaps rather the minimal share atmosphere, within which alone the members of society can breathe and survive and produce. For a given society, it must be one in which they can all breathe and speak and produce: so it must be the same



culture. Moreover, it must now be a great or high (literate, training sustained) culture, and can no longer be a diversified, locality tied, illiterate little culture or tradition.”<sup>36</sup> In such an ideologically driven project then, culture comes to be identified as the officially sanctioned version of high culture while at the same time remaining that site of contestation, the one which problematizes national culture and interrogates the strategies and mechanisms whereby it is enforced, maintained and its very role privileged in order to secure the dominance of given groups in a society.

National film, through the institutions of national cinemas, and eventually the broadcasting projects organized around public monopolies with their plots and arguments enacted in a recognized common social space gave the impression and offered the possibility of addressing an imagined national community prior to its actual formation or as it was in the process of forming.<sup>37</sup>

Thus analyzing popular Italian cinema as a site of ambivalent resistance to the dominant modes of analysis one is accustomed to when discussing Italian national

cinema reveals a series of blindspots inherent in both social theory and the approaches prompted from this perspective as well as those approaching the cinema from a more textual perspective. In fact, a look at the particular texts of the popular cinema will demonstrate a realm of concerns unconstrained by national discourse and hegemonic culture and a clear refusal to abide to the normative guidelines of “proper” bourgeois entertainment. Thanks to their relegation into the depths of lowbrow culture these cinematic expressions have developed an autonomous voice inside the panorama of national popular entertainment that provide ample space for subversive readings and theoretical/historical rearticulations.

The particular instances of “Italian horror”, “Italian westerns”, “Italian comedy” or the explicitly national characters of the *peplum* or the *giallo* or the *poliziottesco* need to be looked at and understood in their specificity and from within the national cultural landscape --not merely as “critical” genres (were they ever such) constructed in excess of their more stable paradigms or as debased and unsuccessful imitations of Hollywood entertainment—so as

to rearticulate the ideologico-political implications of the films from within the wider perspective of Italian national discourse and begin an inquiry into the “popular” nature of the films themselves. How far they are expressions of a so-called popular culture and how far they are a mass consumer product imposed by the interests that control the market? By challenging the social tastes and values of the nation, without resorting to the elitism of the modernist art cinema or of the avant-gardes, these films provide ample space to analyze the various forces at work in the processes of inclusion/exclusion in national cultural discourse.

While the conditions of existence of Hollywood filmic discourse and the industrial organization of the film industry in the US is constructed as a mainly productive structure shaped, following the capitalist mode and criteria of production, on the market (an all encompassing one which Miriam Hansen has defined as constructing an industrial-commercial public sphere<sup>38</sup>) the conditions of existence of a cinema industry built around the construction of a “national” culture in Italy relies all the more heavily on political conditions, shifting from the more

obvious and evident during the Fascist period, to the more subtle and subterranean of the post-war period. One need only look at the laws on culture in general and the cinema laws in particular and the parliamentary debates surrounding legislation on the subsidization of the cinema industry to note the enormous importance that the state (through the party structure of the DC but also the PCI) accorded “cinematographic politics”. The outcome of the laws demonstrate the precise design to control the industry through political and legislative pressures by structuring a legislative action based on direct subsidies (hence more controllable by the state apparatus) rather than the more obvious route of taxation on foreign products in order to guarantee a more equal and a less controlled redistribution of wealth within the industry.

Paradoxically and contrary to what one may assume the cinema by becoming a national industry (in its shift from a spontaneous means of communication to a more precise geometric and productive apparatus), enters in its entirety, in all of its structural articulations (which would mean productive, distributive, exhibitive, aesthetic,

theoretically, historically and censorshipwise) in a more complex and often totalizing design/discourse of national politics/design.

Tied to the discourses of the nation and of central discursive importance are the manners in which history enter into the picture.

## CHAPTER 3

### History and Narrative

The debate on "history" and "making history" has all too often been caught up into an on-going dispute between what has been termed a historicist view and, in opposition to that, an anti-historicist view of what the object of historical investigation is. While the historicist camp argues for the possibility of gaining positive knowledge about the past through an empiricist investigation of events/facts (the objects of historical investigation and reconstruction), the anti-historicist camp counters this claim by introducing into the question the intricacies of power and knowledge which are at the base of such a positivistic contention, rejecting

the "past" --as it is conceptualized by the historicist camp-- as a principle of validation. According to anti-historicism, any reconstruction of the past is a construction in the present; at the same time history must be conceptualized as it is constituted in and by knowledge.

Influenced by the structuralist/semiotic modes of interpretation, the anti-historicist viewpoint has in fact opened up the theoretical field for a more complicated view of history. "History" is seen as a discursive activity, one of the "truth discourses" that Foucault in The Archeology of Knowledge<sup>39</sup> identified as intersecting to provide the nexus of power and knowledge of a certain era. Theorists such as Hayden White in The Content of the Form) and Roland Barthes in his essay "The Discourse of History" have pointed out the problems associated with an understanding of history in a historicist mode.

Hayden White writes of the paradox of the writing of history. According to him, history as the (discursive) activity conceptualized by historicism needs to have a pre-textual referent in order to attain any validity. According to Hayden White, historical narrativity is based on a foundational

opposition between history and fiction in that facts need to fit into a schematic, linguistic and narrative framework in order to enter history, yet history can have no validity if it does not have a pre-textual referent.<sup>40</sup> (It is ironic that it is only when fact is made into fiction--i.e., chronicle is made into conjunctural story--that it gets accepted as history). In this, White sees historical narrative as a paradox, almost an oxymoron. It is only when "fact" is made into fiction, when the events which are the object of historical investigation are narrativized, that history acquires any sort of significance; what is actually the production of a signified is camouflaged as the uncovering of a referent, that real which will never be attained.

White's contentions are echoed in Roland Barthes in much the same manner: the effect of the "paradox" is here named the "*effet du reel*". According to Barthes what the work of history is engaged in is the reduction of a three term structure of signification into a two term structure, where the real itself is transformed into a signified --the referent is projected into a realm that is beyond signification from



which position it can be thought to precede and determine the discourse which it posits as referent.

Ultimately, the historicist pretension of delivering, recovering, and reconstructing the "real past" is countered by the idea that the "real past" is not recoverable if not in a fictionalized form, thus bestowing on any form of historicist work the status of fiction which has little to offer if not a reflection on the present. However, for all their theoretical, methodological and ethical differences, the two camps of historiography have one crucial factor in common: the presupposition of a "history" or a "real past" *in* which the events which are brought to light and historicized occur. With all its critique of historicism, the anti-historicist position still accepts the conception of traditional historical work, which is that of attempting to uncover --however frustratingly-- a pre-existent past. The past is still conceptualized as an object, at an extra-textual level (even though it is unattainable). Ultimately the allegiance of the anti-historicist camp remains faithful to that of a mythical past whose integrity is defied by contemporary practices of representation; it is the practices of representation which

are lacking against a whole and unified/objectified past. What the argument ultimately points to is a conception of "history" as "past" (and consequently of the "present") which is wholly distinct from the specific representations that are called into question.

In this manner of understanding, the context of a previous socio-historical period is seen as a social/extra-discursive, extra-textual domain which produces texts as a reflection of it in order to serve its ideological project. The use of the documents from the past can only in this way be conceptualized as participating in creating some kind of fiction. A conception of such a fiction necessarily presupposes some form of truth or "real" which is being subsumed to the narrativizing effects of the "writing of history".

Much more productive would be the conception of the context of the "past" as produced through a set of discursive and inter-textual determinations which are constructed through textual operations. Approached in this way, the shortcomings of this reification of the "past" become most

obvious when they are confronted with the more productive conceptualization of the "writing of history" put forth by Michel DeCerteau, in The Writing of History.<sup>41</sup> According to deCerteau "history" exists as a function of the relationship between objects and processes: the processes of the work of history (history as process and discursive activity) and the objects/events of the past which are invoked by the discipline. In between these poles, of past and present, product and procedure, self and other, history constructs its "space" and its boundaries. It is only in this movement, in the initial temporal division posited through its discursive activity that history comes into being; the initial break is both assumed and posited by the historian, this initial differentiation always in the process of being constructed and deconstructed in the work of the historian. The past is therefore presumed on the basis of traces from the past that are given the status of clues of the existence of a previous socio-cultural conjuncture. It is in the work done on these "clues", by the procedures of the historian, that history is produced.

The boundaries of history are therefore unstable, as they become a function of the historian's shifting position and of the traces that are included as part of that position as the evidence of the past. Like the construction of an identity (the identity of the present) by conceptualizing an other (the past), that identity is always necessarily contradictory. The initial differentiation of the past from the present is endlessly operational in the work of history and it is the relationship between the past and the ideologies in the present used in reconstructing it that are central to deCerteau's analysis.

History then comes into existence the moment the past is differentiated from the present, and yet it is only from the location within the present that the past can speak. This initial differentiation is endlessly reconstituted in the labor of history. For instance, the past exists in the irreducibly dual mode as the postulate of the analysis (we must assume that there is a past) and as the end product of the analysis (history "presents" the past). The present is the location of the narrative (the "here" of the narrative that acquires its

status in differentiating itself from the “then” of events), which imposes its own hegemonies and its own selectivity in the inclusions and exclusions it makes in representing the past. This relationship between the past and the ideologies used in reconstructing it are central to DeCerteau, who appreciates the shift in focus that Gramsci brings about in redefining the “history of ideas” as the “history of organic intellectuals.” It makes visible the site of knowledge production and its predilections. This process of differentiation, between the procedures of inscription (*écriture*) and the described, inscribed social body of the past (*reel*) is not ahistorical, but part of modernity. Historiography speaks with a modern voice for DeCerteau, and he gives as his paradigmatic example the illustration by Jan Van der Straet (in the 1600s) of Amerigo Vespucci, with his European instruments of (military, scientific) command encountering a naked and female America on a hammock. This moment symbolizes, for DeCerteau, the birth of a “writing that conquers” (which is history) in its “will to write” over a “written body”. Writing, then, necessarily describes another and this “other” may shift.

DeCerteau looks at the Native American, the past, death, and the possessed woman as “the other” and analyzes what can be seen as the anthropological condition of history. The writing of history exhumes the dead, it defies death in keeping its memory alive, and yet these “ghost get access to writing on the condition that they remain forever silent.” Writing is always terrorized by the “return of the repressed”, the past, the dead, in that if the dead were to speak for themselves, history would lose its vocation. Historical writing exists only insofar as it can speak for another.

The significance of this gets clearer when cast in terms of the narrative that constructs its intelligibility and coherence premised on the lack of coherence of the “other” (the past, death, the madwoman) and premised on the fact that their being enlanguaged is the only condition / possibility of their existence. He analyzes the series of sorceries and possessions of the Ursuline nuns (1610-30) in this context. The very condition of these women (possession) meant they could not speak for themselves. Demonological inquisitions were the only condition of the

transcription and intelligibility of their scripts. However, they constituted a threat to the normative discourse (which constructs its normativity on the basis of the “others” unintelligibility) because they refused a determinate position. They, as the possessed, were legion, they had no “I”, they shifted their position and it was only by naming them and speaking on their behalf that the inquisitors could define the relative positions of the sane and lunatic.

This long sidetrack on De Certeau is fundamental in operating that recalibration of thinking about history, power and discourse we had posited at the beginning as the power-play proposed --between that which has access to inscription and that which is uninscribed. Bringing the debates back within the realm of the cinema itself Pierre Sorlin offers an important contribution to overcome the historicist/anti-historicist debate as it related to film.

In The Film in History<sup>42</sup> (but starting from his Sociologie du Cinema<sup>43</sup>, and developed further in European Cinemas, European Societies<sup>44</sup>, and together with Marie-

Claire Ropars and Michel Lagny in Generique des Annees '30<sup>45</sup>) Sorlin calls for an understanding of film texts as historical documents. Films in this manner are seen on the equal level of documents and artifacts of previous socio-cultural formations. It is in their status as representations that the films need to be looked at.

The work of Sorlin (complicated with an understanding of history through the work of Michel deCerteau) points to conceptualizing cinema and history as separate but interacting practices. Sorlin in this way elucidates the ways in which film texts "make history". As evidence of their contemporaneity, film texts are always traces, documents, artifacts of the past which can be looked at (in their specificity as audiovisual texts) for the ways in which they elucidate an understanding of certain structural relations and societal organizations. At the same time, a particular mode of film narrative, the historical narrative film, gains the special status of a particular type of social document as it "presents a view of the present embedded within a picture of the past". As a "genre" of narrative, the historical film is employed as a "historiographic apparatus". This goes ways



into complicating the historicist/anti-historicist debate which was duplicated in film studies in regards to the historical narrative film (Heath, MacCabe, the Cahiers critics, etc).

Sorlin tackles the question of what a film text is capable of telling as to the social context in which it is produced. Rejecting a simplistic approach like that undertaken by Kracauer in From Caligari to Hitler<sup>46</sup>, where films are seen as the mere reflection of the social context (and in this sense complicating the scientific-deterministic stance of much of Marxist historiography) and going beyond even much of the work conducted by Marc Ferro in Cinema and History.<sup>47</sup> While Ferro did present a more sophisticated account of the ways in which films relate themselves to society, not a simple reflection, but also as pointing to absences, blind spots, psychic processes, possible dynamics and the dominant modes of knowledge --for Ferro, it is not simple reflection but rather representation that films offer-- Sorlin furthers the discussion by concentrating on the modes of representations themselves as the objects of analysis. Films make history not in the sense that they offer

a representation of society. It is the representation that the films offer that must be the object of analysis for the historian. In other words, as representation, the cinema does not simply represent a social formation (let alone "reflect" it) but that which a social formation deems *representable* and the ways in which representation itself is conceived. The cinema thus, according to Sorlin, brings into evidence a mode of seeing, it allows the possibility of distinguishing between what is visible and that which is not and through this of recognizing the ideological limits that a social formation puts on its capacity for perception. Literally, according to Sorlin, the cinema tells us what a social formation "sees", to which representations, figures, images it bestows its thoughts, what recastings it works out to hide the contradictions of its discursive activity and, at the same time, what is left out, un-spoken, un-shown, un-represented. Ultimately what Sorlin finds in film texts as documents/traces of their contemporaneity is a *view* of their present, not the present itself.

The visible therefore reveals the discursive practices and ideologies of a social formation, it tells us through what

representations the social formation recasts the real and takes control of it, producing it as an object of knowledge. The cinema does not reproduce reality but the ways in which reality is understood.

In deCerteau's terms. then, film texts understood in this way do not merely reflect history (a reflection which may be conceptualized as possible or impossible); they *make* history in the sense that they are to be considered as a large part of those representations, those traces of the past which produce the possibility of presuming the past from a present, those objects on which, the work of the historian, the writing of history, must act in order to produce history. History then is constituted by texts, not as a given on which texts are subsequently laid out and films are a particular type of text on which the work of the historian acts.

The implications of this mode of thinking then has vast repercussions for the way film texts can be used in the work of history and in the social sciences: as documents, it is not only in the image of a society that the film texts work to "make history", in their denotation/indexicality to the pro-filmic reality that is filmed, but rather in how that image is

employed through the textual strategies of the film that is important. It is not the documentary aspect of the cinema which is important but rather the structures of meaningfulness which are of use to the historian when confronted with a film as a trace/artifact of previous socio-cultural conjunctures. The textuality as ideology work of film theorists such as Heath, MacCabe, Rosen, Comolli, Mulvey and their engagement with the structural specificities of the cinematographic apparatus in constructing ways of seeing becomes important in this respect as their work participates in "writing history".<sup>48</sup>

Another way in which film texts "make history" is as historical narratives. In this way they participate more directly in the writing of history so much that film becomes a historiographic apparatus in its own right. As Sorlin writes, the historical narrative film presents us with a "view of the present embedded in a picture of the past". The problem with the historical film is that it is defined in terms of a discipline that is completely outside the cinema.

The historicist/anti-historicist debate was recast inside of cinema studies in relation to the historical narrative film. While historicism defined the historical film on the basis of its supposed faithfulness to the existing knowledge on history, in terms of its supposed accuracy and faithfulness in representing the events of history, anti-historicism refused any type of engagement with history, and any mention of the past was violently attacked as a "lapse" into historicism. Again, as in the discipline of historiography the problems involved with the anti-historicist stance is a blindness to the ways historical narratives may help to understand how historical knowledge is constructed through the mediation of documents, texts and representations. The allegiance to a "past" which is unrecoverable yet becomes the measure of all work done on the past and any representation of history definitely closes the avenues of further investigation into history, on the question of historical knowledge and on the question of how the representations of the past actually work inside of contemporary institutional practices (which include both film and history).

An example of how the closure of the debate in regards to the historical narrative film affects film studies can be detected in the polemics that followed Michel Foucault's interview with Pascal Bonitzer and Serge Toubiana for the Cahiers du Cinema in 1977<sup>49</sup> in terms of the dynamism of *popular memory*.

Popular memory, or the “not-said” in history, also constitutes an “other” that inscribed history attempts to control, for, in his words, “to control a people’s memory is to control their dynamism”. The “Self” that is constructed in the process, in constant (and contentious) “dialogue in absentia” with the “Other” does not hide or suppress the other. Theorists such as Foucault and DeCerteau (and Lacan in regards to the *unconscious* and that which is ultimately repressed psychically) maintain that the invisible is not so much below the surface as a structuring absence. In effect, the necessary invisible is always present in its structuring of the visible. In this position, it also always poses a threat to the visible when it challenges its form of constructing its regularity.

Foucault discusses the issue of popular memory as the "not-said" in history, as those traces which are left out in the procedures of the writing of history, as the "other" that history must suppress in order to construct its own intelligibility (as that which remains uninscribed). Accusations of historicism abounded against Foucault for attempting to posit a different "truth" that is silenced by the "falsity" of dominant historiography (cf. Heath, "Contexts" in Edinburgh Magazine '77). However, if one reads Foucault's assertions outside of the frame work of the historicist/anti-historicist debate, a different view comes to the surface. It is of representations that Foucault talks about, and therefore it is in the order of representations that the imputed silencing occurs: it is not the reconstruction of a truer "past event" that Foucault is talking about but simply on the recuperation of representations of the past that have been silenced by the work of history. The "real event" might not be recuperable as "real" but the representations are there available for (re)presentation. It is a different conceptualization of the past through the representations that have been silenced that needs to be promoted; not an

objectified conception of the past existing prior to its textual manifestation, but rather as a past that is produced through the representations.

Conceptualized in this way the writing of history and the writing of history through the employment of narrative historical film become highly unstable modes of representation, both in their similarities and in their differences. The representations of the past that are silenced --in order to give intelligibility to the dominant constructions of the present-- are also potentially present as a structuring absence, ready to insert instabilities in the tenuous coherence that the discourses of history and film give to one another. The silenced representations of the past are always present in their necessity for their structuring of what is instead promoted. Like in Lacanian theorizations of the unconscious, the "Self "constructed in a constant and opposing dialogue with the "Other" becomes destabilized with the possibility of the threat that a return of the structuring absence poses to it. Those representations which are silenced are always already present in the intelligibility that the discourse of history attempts to give



itself. The representations provided by film texts in their contemporaneity and the mode of historiography of the historical film present such threats. Cinema and history understood as separate but interacting discursive practices have the potential of bringing this to the surface without the necessity of one relying on the other one for coherence or validation. Both understood as systems of knowledge, their contradiction when working with the same material pointing to possible destabilizations. The historical film is important for the ruptures and interferences that "history" as another discursive practice brings to bear on the cinematic text. For example, in positing the classical historical narrative as an example of the mode of "histoire" (the distinction between "histoire" and "discourse" is from Benveniste, Problems in General Linguistics<sup>50</sup>, where the mark of enunciation is absent does not take into account of the structuring elements of a film text where even though the narrator might be absent, that absence is nonetheless structuring. A specific analysis of the filmic text might point to the ways in which the narrative necessarily shifts between the poles of "histoire" and "discours" (where the mark of enunciation is

visible); this capacity (or necessity) to shift between the two registers of discourse is a mark of the instability built into the text and of how the historical narrative marks the presence of its "producer" even in the face of textual strategies which attempt to efface that presence.

Commolli has also remarked in regards to the historical film, as to how the images of history provide "a body too much" when inserted in the historical narrative film, the body of the actor portraying a historical figure constantly playing with the suspension of disbelief which is a prerogative of the cinematic illusion as the spectator has to negotiate with a series of references which he/she brings into the film from different discursive practices. Mimi White notes it is in fact the referential information (a referential body and not the "real" body of the historical character) which underscores the engagement of the spectator with the text rather than the "real" of a body, in this way forming not a "body too much" but rather "an extra body of reference".

Finally, and this is a question which I will only hint at, another way for film texts to make history is produced when

the film texts themselves come to be viewed as the "event" or "traces" of a particular history, that of film. It might be in this manner that the discursive practices of film and history are at their most intermingled. What is kept of the traces of the history of film and what is left out allows for a creation of particular histories based on particular representations. The importance that the cinema has attained both for its value as historical documents and the possibilities that it opens for a different conception of the historiographic operation makes the "writing of the history of the cinema" one of the important areas where the representations on which the past is produced, memories are reconfigured and histories are constructed an important area of engagement.

The nation, then, as an "extra body of reference" constructed through the diverse sources of popular history, literature, mythology, comic books, or, eventually, television shows, always informs the viewers' engagements with texts that utilize the national mode of address.<sup>51</sup> An example from Rosenstone's Revisioning History<sup>52</sup> of how the nation--as an extra-textual referent--is used by the text (rather than the

readers) in malleable ways is Geoff Eley's analysis of the image of the '30s in the '40s as opposed to the '70s. The poverty and unemployment of the "devil's decade" in Britain was played up in the '40s as it became a reminder for why the war needed to be fought. The '30s symbolized all that the nation did not want to go back to, and all that could be paraded before the viewers to remind them of the need to fight. The '70s, on the other hand, was a time when justifications to cut welfare were being sought by the state. This "present" marked its difference from the past and justified itself in its argument that a different attitude to poverty was called upon.

In the context of this dialectical alterity, it may be productive to ask the question: what functions as the nation's other? As Andrew Parker in Nationalisms and Sexualities <sup>53</sup> argues, a nation's other <sup>54</sup> is constantly reconstructed: it may be the other nations, an apocalyptic future, a minority community, the women, the poor, the non-productive. As Tom Nairn <sup>55</sup> sees it, a nation's discourse is always "Janus-faced" in its multiple appeals and ends, and as Homi Bhabha argues, the nation's

discourse is always “*in medias res*” or in the process of reifying new selves and making new others<sup>56</sup>. A nation may also be divided within its hegemonic self in that its own memory may be its other (for example Germany dealing with Nazism as written about by Kaes in From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History As Film<sup>57</sup>; or the US dealing with Vietnam).

Memory, then as Freud told us, functions as the locus of identity. While for Plato memory was the dimension that brought objects in to contact with their ideal forms, for Freud it became a fundamentally de-stabilizing concept; it was that which made a subject incoherent in that every present event was given the power to re-shape memory in a certain way. Yet remembering is also a therapeutic process in Freud, and the reconstitution of the past (which may not be the past remembered as it was but the past remembered in a form acceptable as truth) becomes a way of dealing with the present --the narrative of obsession and neuroses replaced by the narrative of recollection.

Warren Kiefer's The Castle of the Living Dead (Italy-Great Britain-United States, 1964) proceeds on the basis of paradoxes and oppositions. Already from its political economic/industrial setting and its authorial "excesses" the film finds itself logged in between many of the spaces that a text representative of a properly national cinema must normally occupy. It is in fact in the crossing of such discursive boundaries and the enactment of these ruptures at the level of narrative that the film works to create meaning. In terms of its industrial and authorial origins first of all the film exists in a gray area where any type of definite "placement" is rendered impossible. As a multi-national co-production it necessarily evades any type of characterization of a national cinema, being the result of a co-operation of the industrial and commercial infrastructures of three national productive entities. The use of actors from the different nationalities of the production (one can recognize Donald Sutherland, Christopher Lee, Lucio Pigozzi [Italy's Peter Lorre!] in some of the main roles) already is testimony to many impositions that such a production necessarily must undergo. If, when limited at

the level of casting, these impositions might be discounted as exerting minimal pressure on the text (although in a narrative such as this where "body types" and "character types" are a central aspect of the narrative, the physiognomy of the actors is quite central to signification) the same cannot be said of the "excesses" that the production aspect of the film imposes on the authorial realm.

The film's director, Warren Kiefer, is a fiction in and of himself. Lurking behind the Anglicized name is Lorenzo Sabatini reiterating a common practice within the popular cinema production and promotional strategies simultaneously and unwittingly introducing an impossible and unstable identification and authority. Castle of the Living Dead is further appropriate as the authorship of the film as being 'really' by Sabatini has been disputed. While the film has been often credited to British director Michael Reeves --who went on to gain a certain notoriety as the director of such classic British horror films as The Conqueror Worm (1968), Witchfinder General (1968) both starring Vincent Price and The Sorcerers (1967) with Boris

Karloff-- and many second unit sequences, especially the pantomime scenes in the castle, the choreography of the "living dead" room and the exterior shots of the Castle garden and its granite statues seem to point to his 'British' directorial "vision", Kiefer/Sabatini's "authorial" touch is also present on the surface, many of the themes that cross the film being more directly related to other works of his (for example, the theme of the fall of a corrupt order is present in his Defeat of the Mafia (1975) and in his crime novels like Outlaw) and certainly the specifically "Italian" preoccupations which the text expresses seem to point at Kiefer's active engagement in the "visual" aspect and the authorial economy of the film. Just to make matters more complicated, there is also the fact that in most Italian prints, the film has been credited to Luciano Ricci (certainly for quota purposes since Sabatini while Italian and as remarked above had not "signed" the film as an Italian.

The opening of the film already is clear in its setting up of a series of oppositions, between the order of history and fiction, nature and culture, the real and the represented and



the high discourses of "culture" properly understood and the low discourses of street fairs. With the voice over narration opening the film and telling of the end of the Napoleon ("put away on an island") the film is immediately placed within the realm of History, as the historical events of the end of the Napoleonic wars are narrated. The spectacle of the hanging (after the prologue of the murder) is directly summoned by the authoritative voice of History. As one begins to watch the public hanging with the historical referent of the turmoil following the wars ("public hangings were common") the spectacular nature of the exercise of power is exposed as just that, a "spectacle" as the hanging is revealed to be a representation of a theatrical company during a popular street fair.

In this way, the film sets up this initial opposition between the authority of History and its reconstruction within and in accordance to the tropes and tastes and procedures of popular culture, the representational aspect of the troupe in the carnevalesque parodying of the authority and power of History enacted during a popular fair.

Already from this initial sequence, the film places a self-reflexive emphasis on its own nature as construction and of its own place in the hierarchy of discourses, the deception of History laid bare in the deception that the theater troupe plays on the spectators at the fair (accounting for its spectacle) and in the deception that the film itself plays on the spectator. In choosing between the authority of the voice of History and the popular representation of it in the carnival, the film firmly assumes its position on the side of the latter.

In recuperating the "commedia dell'arte" as a source for the telling of a "historical" narrative, the film seems to be attempting to shake off a whole literary and theatrical tradition that had been set up as a source for historical representation in Italian national cinema (from Blasetti's 1860 to Visconti's The Leopard). Even though Castle of the Living Dead does not openly declare its engagement with the problematic of the Risorgimento and the unification of Italy, it is nonetheless true that most mythical narratives of the process of unification cluster in the period following the demise of Napoleon, where Napoleon is constructed and

deconstructed both as an aggressor to a national unity (that still did not exist) and an instigator and conduit to the arrival of the ideals of the bourgeois revolution in Italy, ultimately ushering Italy into modernity. The employment of the characters from the popular theater works to upset a certain system of representation and institutes the possibility of setting up a new one, one that can exemplify the possibility of a new form of "writing of history".

History in the guise of life rather than death is continuously invoked in the film's narrative. The representation of History by the theatrical troupe is openly contrasted to the representation of History that the Count (as representative of a dying order) puts in action through his scientific experiments. The immobility of the characters in the Count's museum (his futile and destructive attempt at preserving life) are directly opposed to the vitality of the both the characters of the commedia (Harlequin, Colombine and the others) and the characters of the film narrative which in more than one way embody their functions (Dart goes through the whole film dressed as Harlequin). Above and beyond the pre-scripted, crystallized version of history

that the Count is trying to reproduce, one that is based on simple appearance, the film, just like the *commedia dell'arte* works on what is commonly called a "canovaccio" (a piece of parchment) which provides a very loose guideline for the actions of the representation on which the actors/characters/masks are left free to improvise in the moment. It is important to note, however, that the masks of the *commedia*, as personified in Castle of the Living Dead, do not in any way point to a more authentic experience offered by the "popular" as opposed to the inauthentic and "false" narrative of the Count. Both the masks in the theatrical representations and in the film are exposed in all of their artificiality, in their constructedness, the stylization of the movements and pantomimes of the various actors echoed throughout the film's narrative. The fractured, residual nature of the "canovaccio", with the space for improvisation and creation pointing to the "productive" nature of the popular, which is therefore not characterized as an appeal to some form of essence but rather "popular" in its capacity of production. De Certeau's conception of the "popular" in The Practice of Everyday Life, which will be

discussed further ahead is a key to this particular understanding.

In line with the conventions and paratactics of the "commedia dell'arte" the actors of the popular representation become all the more significant by virtue of their physical appearance and behavior rather than by their skill as interpreters of canonical literary texts or of a pre-scripted narratives. It is the use of the "body" in an expressive fashion, rather than the necessity of following some pre-written form of theatrical text that gives the masks of the "commedia" their vitality; a vitality which the film constructs in opposition to the death prompted by the order of representations of Count Drago.

What the film ultimately enacts is the destruction of an old order, as it proceeds through these oppositions. During the funeral scene, for example, there is an alternation of shots between the Count, as he reads the eulogy for Bruno, and one which frames both Laura and Erik together. What is evident in this scene is how the "monuments" of history, the stone immobile constructions which are given prominence in the mise-en-scene (the giant mask from

which one emerges out of the castle, the various statues in the garden, the castle itself, the bodies "treated" by the Count) assume their place in their narrative as characters in their own right. Just as Erik and Laura are framed together, so is the Count framed with the dome of the cathedral, the two of them occupying the same space and proportion of the frame as Erik and Laura. This framing of the Count with the lifeless forms that surround him is a constant solution employed throughout the film, in a sense creating a parallel between his as "the embalmer" and his status as "embalmed". The end he meets confirms this, as he turns into one of his own creations, immobilized in a mask of terror.

The immobility of the order represented by the Count is further enforced with the themes of nomadism and rootlessness that the troupe puts into play. The film is very explicit about the attitude of "authority" in this regard --not only the Count's through his explicit contempt for Laura's refusal to stay with him in the castle and her preference for "life on the road", but also the policeman's, one of the

characters played by Donald Sutherland, who warns the Count to "let those gypsies<sup>58</sup> go packing", indicate this.

The film sets up oppositions also at the level of gender relations. There are three female characters each one of them caught up in some sort of relation to the patriarchal order of the Count. Laura is firmly set in opposition to it, as she is associated with the vitality and subversiveness of the theatrical troupe, a positioning which presents her in a position of power in respect to the others --she is literate, the true descendant of the dynastic heritage of the troupe, she also does not "belong" to anyone in the company even more emphasizing her autonomy in her own order<sup>59</sup>. As a woman not in his "possession" Laura is also an evident object of the Count's desire, his final eruption of violence a result of the frustration of this desire. The opposition between the two is exemplified in their dialogue, when the Count asks her to stay with him: "You will be my Colombine" he tells her (pointing to the Count's attempts at making his even the representations of popular culture), without realizing that she already is Colombine and it is precisely in virtue of this 'being' that she remains outside of

the power that he represents, operating in a position of autonomy from him.

At the other end, firmly inside of the Count's order, is his wife, turned to stone while looking at herself in the mirror. The third character, the "witch", occupies a position in the middle, having been made into what she is by the Count, the true living sign --not by chance the most "grotesque" of the characters-- of the results of the Count's activities<sup>60</sup>. It is the witch, because of her straddling the two "spaces" that is the one who sees all, knows all and in the end manages to give the final blow to the old order as she stabs the Count with his own weapon.

Ultimately, the film enacts a reflection on the contemporaneity of the situation in Italy, the effects of modernization, new "subjectivities" being enacted and produced, the new gender roles being reassigned by the transformations, the attending political disorders and the attempts of a crumbling old order to hold on to a certain "vision" of the world and --tied to all of these questions-- of identity and their attendant History. The film, in fact,



explores the interface between anonymous individuals/characters and history, the "practice of everyday life" and "public events", all the time evading both the epic sweep of films like 1860 or 1900 or the concern with the hard sociology and issues of contemporaneity found in neo-realist films such as De Sica's The Bicycle Thief. While such films present either an allegorization of the imagined community of the nation, as "Italy" becomes the ultimate referent of the social collectivity or a form of writing history where the social, class, gender and regional differences are initially enacted but eventually and inexorably subsumed and contained back under an abstract, imaginary identity, a film like Castle of the Living Dead, through its foregrounding of its status and an acknowledgment of its position in the cultural hierarchy manages to break the conceptualization of a History which pre-exists its textual implementation. History is here seen as an effect, as produced textually rather than pre-existing as referent. Finally, as a form of "popular" film, Castle of the Living Dead, relies on the foregrounded artifice of its representations and the parallels that it draws with the

"commedia" to disentangle historical representation both from the operative proportions of the first and the documentaristic aspect of the second lodging it firmly within the "popular" in its Foucauldian understanding. In this manner the film opens a space for spectator engagement which evades the homogeneity of the "national" as this comes to be produced in the text. In the film, there is an ease with which the past and the present merge, their fluidity constructed by visual cuts and sound-bridges from one spatial configuration and temporal perspective to the other. The further we are in the narrative, the easier it gets. The representation of the commedia do not allow themselves to be contained and are not reassuring, functioning as they do as additional distractions away from their order and duty.

Hayden White has said that the processes of written history involve qualification, symbolization, condensation, and displacement and are similar in this to the processes used in film-production. White attempts (in The Content of the Form, for instance) to draw attention to the

transformative processes that occur when one form of discourse (of “facts”) is translated into another (of “history”). One of the crucial differences is the addition of plot and time in the latter, as the form moves to attributing causality (not just “X happened, then Y happened” but why and how things happened). According to him, there can be no description without a story, no story without a plot, and no plot without a “pre-generic plot structure”. This “pre-generic” structure (which has affinities to Foucault’s episteme, but seems devoid of the power-nexus<sup>61</sup>) is more evident in the literature of the time, as history hides its performative modes. White identifies these performative modes of historical enunciation as the *aesthetic* mode (which narrates the event by giving it the structure of a genre, the identification of which is a comprehension of how meaning is produced by the narrative), the *explanatory* mode (the manner in which specific events are framed within larger ones to give them meaning), and the *ideological* mode (the historian’s process of selectivity). While DeCerteau and Foucault have a more complex and less intentionalist way of analyzing the ideological processes of

the production of history (DeCerteau via “place” and Foucault via “discursive formations”), the attention that White draws to the narrative mediation of history is important.<sup>62</sup>

Castle of the Living Dead references different genres to construct its tale: the horror genre, the gothic genre, melodrama. In doing so it manages --while being what Mark Dery says is “by universal consensus, not high art...an especially forgettable example of the spaghetti-gothic thrillers turned out by Italian moviemakers in the ‘60s, it’s a low-budget affair, badly dubbed, creaky with clichés, marred by hammy performances” yet still capable of “settling at the bottom of the unconscious”—to illuminate what was apparently this ‘submerged’ but pervasive tendency in contemporary popular Italian cinema and culture, a desire as such in the true psychoanalytical understanding, to remake and rework what Jacques Ranci re has called the “dominant fiction”, the ideological reality or “image of social consensus” within which members of a society are asked to identify themselves with.

## CHAPTER 4

Questioning the relationship between cultural and social identities, class and cultural production necessarily forces one to confront the "question of the superstructure".

In traditional Marxist accounts, where class is understood as an objective structural position of social subjects in relation to the mode of production of a given society, the relation of the superstructure --namely the cultural sphere-- to the base --the material economic relations of production-- is one that has often followed an economic determinism that, if untenable in principle,

becomes all the more untenable in our present socio-cultural conjuncture with its heterogeneous cultural fields and modes of productions. Starting from the more simplistic version of an outdated (and outmoded) economic determinism (in its various guises, be it theorized as a mechanical causality --where the economic is seen as mechanically or directly impinging on the cultural to the point that the latter is directly "caused" by the former-- or as an expressive causality --where the cultural is seen as expressing the infrastructure/base in almost idealistic and essentializing terms), the relation between social class and cultural production is a contradictory and complicated area of inquiry in social and cultural analysis and one of the most central.

Attempting to go beyond the problems of the economic determinism that much orthodox Marxism posed in characterizing the relation of the economic to the cultural, Louis Althusser, influenced in varied degrees by the studies in semiotics/structuralism and Freudian psychoanalysis, provided a first theorization outside of the bind of essentialism that both mechanical and expressive causality

engendered. Through the idea of a "structural causality" and its subsequent expansion by way of the concept of "overdetermination", Althusser managed to open up the closure that Marxism had imposed on itself when investigating the "question of the superstructure."

What Althusser attempted to do was rid Marxism of any reference to any conception of a hidden essence working behind the sphere of cultural production and arrive at providing an explanation of the structure of "social reality" which did not rest on any notion of a hidden relation of causality. Structural causality thus attempts to analyze the superstructure in terms of the relations of the various elements that compose it, providing some sort of blueprint for an investigation into social and cultural production which does not rest on a presupposition of any form of essence of which the cultural sphere is a supposed reflection or expression of. In this sense the economic, which in traditional Marxist analysis was always understood as being the determining cause "in the last instance", becomes just one of the structures which operate within a society in order to produce "social reality". "Social

reality" is in fact understood as being produced in the relations among the elements that comprise the superstructure (which at this point ceases to be necessarily termed as such since there is no "base" on which the "superstructure" rests).

Once the elements of the structure and the elements of the relations among them are added up, the social analyst is confronted with a totality which can be seen as incorporating the structure itself, thus creating the ultimate determinant structure only within the working of the relations among the various processes, none of them assuming a dominant position on the basis of which all the other ones follow. Social totality here is then reconceived as a structural totality produced only in the relations of all the various elements of the structure. In this sense the economic structure stops working as a "hidden cause" or "hidden foundation" and takes its place in the structuring of the social as one among many. It is not that the economic loses its powerful role envisaged for it by Marx: Althusser mainly reassigns to it a role on the level of the other structures which make up society and with the introduction



of the notion of "overdetermination" still permits a Marxist understanding of the economic as something to be analyzed in terms of its condition of existence and in terms of the effects of its interaction with the other structures/processes.

Through an understanding of "overdetermination" every social structure is seen as a unique site constituted by the interaction of all other social processes in a social formation. According to Althusser, each structure possesses a degree of "relative autonomy" in respect to the others, but is at the same time "determined" by them and concurrently determines their operations. Through the idea of "overdetermination" and the concept of "relative autonomy" each structure functions in partial independence of all the others and thus exerts a reciprocal influence on the functioning of the system/structure as a whole.

In The Political Unconscious, Fredric Jameson, works to integrate the Althusserian problematic inside what he considers to be a necessarily Marxist viewpoint. Accepting Althusser's theorization of an underlying "structural causality" constituting the variable and heterogeneous

determinations in the cultural, political and economic spheres, he nonetheless sees a fundamental problem with Althusser's theory: that is in regards to the problem of a "totality" and the question of "mediation". While accepting the critique of "homology" --one which would have to necessarily rest upon a conception of "expressive causality"- - Jameson refuses Althusser's dismissal of "mediation" as a central category. In Jameson's work "mediation" is a central facet of any social and cultural theory that still wishes to call itself Marxist.

In Althusser's model, the "totality" of the structure is something that is part of the structure itself. This is one of the preconditions to the acceptance of the notion of "overdetermination". Jameson, on the other hand, posits the untenability of such a characterization. A totality that would be a product of the relation among the processes and structures that comprise it and that would itself be included in the structure would necessarily, according to Jameson, posit a breakdown in the critique that Marxism can move against Capitalism. The concept of a "totality" is, still

according to Jameson, a pre-requisite of the critical role that Marxism has in combating the divisions and alienation that capitalism as a system provokes.<sup>63</sup>

Jameson's questioning of Althusser becomes all the more urgent when one thinks of the role that class would have in a (Marxist) theory that does not posit any type of "totality" or "ultimate determinants". Again, however, if one reads the concept of class as also "overdetermined" and one understands class as a process and a position rather than an objectified entity then the "meaning" of class cannot be constructed apart from its discursive conditions of existence.

If there is one criticism that needs to be moved against Althusser's theory it is the fact that in writings such as the essay "Ideological State Apparatus" (ISA) the elevation of such "apparatuses" (the school, the family, the church, the law, etc.) as the primary sites within which the subject of a capitalist social formation are interpellated is much too homogenizing<sup>64</sup>. While the concept of "overdetermination" would suggest a diffused dispersion of subjectification processes, the ISA as they are conceived by Althusser point

to a centering of such processes, almost to the point of elevating the conception of subjectification as a dominant, determining process. Part of the problems that Althusser's application to film studies encountered in terms of elaborating a political understanding of film practice can be seen to reside in this area.

The concept of "hegemony" as theorized by Gramsci is here a more useful characterization to point out some of the varied and heterogeneous ways in which the components of the structure, as processes, interact with one another, opening spaces for resistance and closing others to subjugation and domination. Gramsci points to the possible understanding of the relation between the various class positions as dialectical, and therefore in their "overdetermination" of the structure, as hegemonic struggles, or struggles for hegemony. What is important however is that the ideological, political or aesthetic/cultural productions don't come to be reduced to being an expression of a determinate class interest or position, as those positions are themselves fluid and constructed in process and discourse<sup>65</sup>.

Class position in this sense cannot be understood as engendering a particular form of cultural production, since in a sense class position is itself produced by cultural production and all the other processes producing the totality. Class position, in fact, becomes merely that: a position in relation to the other processes which has as much to do with the particular cultural productions as the other ones. In this way however, class --the economic-- although relinquishing its position as final determinant still retains its central position as always determining the cultural text, even though not in isolation or as an essential conceptualization.

One way of addressing this question has been proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. The "question of the superstructure" and the relationship between class and cultural production is at the heart of his sociological enterprise. Although his work has in many ways opened up the field of cultural analysis by providing the framework in which one can think of class outside of some objective structural position in which it is put by traditional Marxist work, some of the conclusions to which Bourdieu arrives at

are problematic if analyzed through the concept of overdetermination. Likewise, Bourdieu's work helped to open up many debates on "cultural value", the question of high and low culture and the relationship that these entertain with social class. However, also in this case, the project exceeds the conclusions which are arrived at, which in one sense, simply reverses the essentialism of previous theories of culture in regards to the differences between the high and the low, elite and vulgar or in historical terms, modernism and realism, avant-garde and "kitsch", key questions as we have seen when analyzing the silencing of specific experiences of the maelstrom brought on by modernity within the cultural arena.

The main problems in Bourdieu's work arise from his assertion that "class" is a fundamental category of experience. Through his conceptualization of the "habitus" - "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures"<sup>66</sup> -he attempts to explain what the particular conditions of existence of a particular class in a class-divided society are. What he wants to uncover are the ways in which the habitus mediates between structures and

practices, how practices and representations are structured and generated "objectively", without, at the same time, being the product of obedience to determinate rules. In other words, what Bourdieu attempts in his project is an analysis of how certain "cultural dispositions" are perpetuated and reproduced across social classes. While he asserts that dispositions are transposable across habitus', his insistence on the habitus as the generating structure of practices and perceptions which are in line with the conditions of existence of which they are a product and which those practices and perceptions reproduce, makes him slip into an uncomfortable essentialism about "identity", "subjectification" and the processes of cultural production. While the "habitus" can be understood as one of the processes/structures that co-exist in the "social reality", participating in the process of "overdetermination" on the par with other structures and processes, Bourdieu makes the move of positing "class" as a fundamental category of it. Bourdieu does posit the importance of looking at social agents as "consumers" and "users" of cultural products (something all too often left behind in much theory) –his

theory is clearly oriented toward consumption, particularly a symbolic consumption-- but in the end posits the modes of consumption, the uses to which cultural practices and texts are put to and the disposition that social agents have towards cultural objects as ultimately determined "in the last instance" by the habitus.

So, class condition according to Bourdieu does impose conditionings and it is in this domain of positing some form of direct correlation between culture and class and the positing of a polarity between the various classes that characterizes the work of Bourdieu. His work has had an enormous importance in as diverse fields and disciplines such as cultural studies, sociology, anthropology and aesthetics.

A clear issue raised by Bourdieu's work relates to his ideas concerning culture per se, cultural values and hierarchies and what he characterizes as typically the "class" markers of cultural texts. Through his idea of the "aesthetic disposition" he posits a simplistic approach to the question of the binary construction between nature and



culture. "Nature" is on the side of the working class and "culture" on the side of "bourgeois" or "middle-class" culture. What Bourdieu does is in more than one way reify the codes of realism and verisimilitude that are supposed to underscore working class aesthetics, essentializing what it is that brings identification and pleasure rather than interrogating these categories as historically determined<sup>67</sup>. In doing so, class assumes to be the underlying logic to culture rather than seeing culture as a negotiation of class position, and class position as the product itself of these negotiations.

Furthermore, Bourdieu sets up a binarism between the concepts of "high" and "popular" aesthetics which he characterizes as something like "class languages"<sup>68</sup>. In this way a single class experience is posited to both what he characterizes as the "dominant class" and the "dominated" classes; at the same time a single aesthetic logic is set up which "necessarily" corresponds to this class experience. The binarism of the high and the popular as "class languages" also assume the character of ahistorical and essential categories. For example, why would the working

class have to be aligned with a conservative, "realist" aesthetic which refuses any type of formal experimentation? Is Bourdieu positing an opposition between an "authentic" and "inauthentic" experience?

Much of the problems that traverse Bourdieu's work is echoed, but reversed, in the modernist criticism proposed by the theorists of modernity and modernism. In the same way that the apparatus that Bourdieu sets up between a popular aesthetic and a high aesthetic, making his preference of the former rest on the positive value that he assigns to it because of its supposed direct correlation to the working class, the critical apparatuses of modernism rest on the positive value they give to the high aesthetic.

The neo-Kantian valorization of modern aesthetic formalism as the place of some genuinely critical and subversive "autonomous" aesthetic, functions to set up such an aesthetic as absolute. In this way --and this is also true in Bourdieu's championing of the popular "naive realism"-- modernist aesthetics forgets of its synchronic origin in opposition to a popular mass culture (which has a practical function for the dominant classes with all the anxieties that

the "mass" brings onto the cultural arena) and diachronically, because of its own historicity. What is ultimately overlooked, both in the works of, for example, theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School or Clement Greenberg and works such as Bourdieu's is the fact of the relationality of cultural forms.

Aesthetic choices are made in negative relation (taste is an example of choices made in negative relation: "good taste" can only be defined on the basis of what it is not) to the other kinds of objects which could have been chosen (involving both the historical sequence to which the object belongs and its position within a synchronic system). In other words, the "inferiority" of the popular aesthetic (as it is characterized by both Greenberg and Bourdieu, as they both believe in the need for a "key" to decipher high art, the first seeing in this the "greatness" and the second the "mystification" of modernist art) is based on accepting the norms of high art as essential in their own right. Understanding the popular as some sort of more naive, inferior or natural form of cultural aesthetic is based on the grounds that high culture has staked out for itself. In both

Bourdieu and Greenberg accounts of high and low culture continue to be characterized and are assumed to be separate instances in themselves. Even though both Bourdieu and Greenberg write in historical periods when the commodification of culture and the rise of the mass audience had not been fully developed there is still a sense of an ahistorical understanding of the relation (both synchronic and diachronic) between cultural expressions. Similar assumptions of separation between the various levels of "culture" seem to be a guiding mythic narrative in cultural theory, a homogeneity which if analyzed historically reveals itself to be in continuous flux, being made and unmade, as the various levels reconfigure themselves in various configurations. Patrick Brantlinger's study of the "theories of mass culture as social decay" points to how these distinctions are more often than not historical<sup>69</sup> and if one takes into consideration Carlo Ginzburg's The Cheese and the Worms, where the cosmogony of a 15th century miller is analyzed through the acts of an inquisition for hereticism<sup>70</sup>, the interrelatedness of popular culture and high/elite culture reveals itself of not being a typical

product of late capitalism and television's constitution of mass audiences.

Jameson has attempted to rethink the relations of mass culture and high culture, casting each not as absolute aesthetic realms (like Bourdieu and Greenberg propose) but rather as dialectically related and interdependent, seeing in them two opposed solutions, two moments of the same totality. What he does not incorporate in his analysis is of course how the two can neither be construed as "separate" or simply "opposed" as they can't be assumed to be homogeneous in themselves. Proposing these realms as two moments of the same totality glosses over the fact that depending on their various articulations with other processes and structures their relation produces a totality that has quite different and distinct problematics.

What ultimately counts is the way each of these cultural forms produces the other in an infinite play of signification. Their meaning are not given in texts but rather are constructed in the relation between texts.

To return to the problem of determination however, and with an understanding of cultural production as always already overdetermined and in flux, with a recognition along with Homi Bhabha of the location of culture in the interstices of official culture, it is not in so much as for their presupposed character that certain forms of cultural production must come to be analyzed for their "subversive" and "progressive" potential and for their capacity to give voice to those class positions which are engaged in political and social struggle. It is rather in their ability to "produce" those configurations which would allow a re-presentation of oppositional voices (diachronically) and a reaffirmation of the existence of marginalized oppositional cultural configuration (synchronically) that certain cultural texts are to be analyzed for the possibilities they offer to explain the role of class and class struggle in the structure. As will be developed below it is the literal obscenity, as being 'out of the scene' of certain forms of cultural production and specific forms of autonomous cultural consumption that matter in these circumstances.

Jameson writes that the cultural text is the specific mechanism through which the collective consciousness represses historical contradictions. Class thus needs to be understood as a political horizon, one which does have a place in the configuring the differences of representation and cultural production. By seeing high and popular culture as relational one can look for the ways in which each instance is constituted on the other, where the various "voices" of class position within each will engender various strategies which will either work to legitimate a ruling class ideology or seek to contest and undermine the same. In this sense class can become one of the codes for rewriting the cultural texts and re-presenting them in terms of the oppositional voices that exist within each cultural text.

Class and the economic, in this way, rather than offer themselves up as an essential and ahistorical "last instance" will become the "product" of a political desire which will seek to expose and produce new configurations of meaning and discourse in cultural texts. The relationship between social class and cultural production thus doesn't become one in which some ultimate "nature" of the relationship

exists but rather is a mutually produced relationship in the way each processes determines the other. Marxism can use this to its advantage by positing the need for the importance of analyzing this relationship on the basis of a political desire (much like Jameson's need for a totality is political and pragmatic rather than "absolute") which can only be cast as function and justification of itself. It is only then that Marxism will be able to live up to its own disdain for any form of essentialism and produce the criteria for the determination of the ends to which its political and theoretical practice are directed. In other words, class struggle is not presupposed in cultural texts, but rather produced through them.

There is a need then to recast the dominant critical theory of mass culture, particularly that dominating social inquiry. Very succinctly, both Axel Honneth and Oskar Negt have proposed points of entry into rethinking a series of blindspots that dominant social theorists like Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas have maintained and perpetuated in their analyses.



The fortunes of Axel Honneth's notoriety and importance seems to rest primarily on his elaboration of the theory of "recognition"<sup>71</sup>. Honneth's work however should also be investigated because of the careful and systematic attempt at reconstructing a critical perspective on the social that takes up from the Frankfurt School critical theory. In fact at the root of the development of his theory of recognition is a deep and fruitful engagement with the inheritance of Frankfurt School critical theory specifically and more generally Marxism itself. Similarly to our discussion above, in fact informing the discussion, is Honneth's critique of the functionalist and 'vulgar Marxist' approach that remained in effect in critical theory. Paradoxically, according to Honneth, it is precisely this functionalism that often was presented as the scientific basis of both the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School and of Marxist theory that constitute what Honneth calls a 'sociological deficit' –an incapacity to take into account the social field in its specificity. According to Honneth Adorno and in particular Horkheimer relied too heavily on an economicist understanding of both individual psychological

dimensions and of cultural processes. Too quick to give up on attempting to explain a form of social reproduction which is not beholden to the imperatives of functionalism and economic determinism Honneth critiques both Adorno and Horkheimer of having lost sight of the 'social' in and of itself, the social understood as that domain within which both individual and collective subjects and subjectivities developed and act on the basis of a communicative action, cultural production and social conflict itself.

Honneth's critique of Adorno is all the more poignant as he sees in his theorizations of negativity not only an incapacity to make space for anything that resembles the social in its specificity but also of giving up on the possibility of a critical theory capable of offering any kind of emancipatory possibilities. Adorno, according to Honneth, has given up on the possibility of the progressive formation of an enlightened consciousness in history (from a left wing rearticulation of Hegelianism) with a negativity manifested in the ultimate triumph of a universal and incessant process of reification. In positing the full realization of the domination of instrumental reason Adorno doubly binds the

possibilities of critical social theory. Principally what is negated is the possibility of a social domain from which new forms of resistance and conflict could emerge and secondly effectively severs critical theory's ties to any possible practice guided by emancipatory and social transformational objectives.

Adorno then negates the possibility of the social and cultural fields as spaces of resistance within which conflicts can be staged. What is rendered impossible here is the possibility of capitalism contradictorily developing the possibilities of resistance and emancipation in favor of an instrumental consciousness governed simply by a principle of domination. Honneth is clear in his critique when he sees in this universal reification posited by Adorno as blocking the transformation of the experience of the oppressed in a reflexive consciousness capable of transforming itself in a practice of emancipation.

Honneth's critiques of the development of critical theory and of its shortcomings are very much to the point as his is a very nuanced understanding of the differences that exist within the tradition of Critical Theory and the

Frankfurt School itself. It is quite revealing that he reserves his most pointed criticisms to those he identifies as belonging to the 'internal circle' (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Lowenthal) while demonstrating a clear intellectual affinity and interest with those he calls the 'outer circle' (Benjamin, Fromm, Neumann) and that the distinctions are not merely distinctions of 'power' within the framework of the 'School' itself but rather these are related to the different thinkers' stance in regards to the question of determination. For all of these 'marginal' heretics one can single out Benjamin –since he is the one most preoccupied specifically with the cultural sphere. His writings demonstrate a clear independence in regards to the monolithic hold of the economic and of the reification in instrumental reason proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer. His understanding of cultural processes as collective experiences, dialectical and overdetermined, contradictory and complex and not simply as the manifestation of commercial degradation, of commodification and standardization and the imposition of ersatz individuality as a consequence of 'mechanical reproduction', vindicates and

justifies the status Benjamin has been able to maintain in cultural analysis as opposed to Adorno and Horkheimer.

Honneth however stops short in truly affirming the emancipatory potentialities of critical theory when he picks Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative action<sup>72</sup> and his conceptualization of the bourgeois public sphere<sup>73</sup> as the most productive way to breath new life in the tradition of critical social theory. According to Honneth Habermas is the only one to have developed an approach that permits a "rediscovery of the social", of connecting the theoretical perspective to an effective praxis in order to reclaim, on new grounds, the possibility of emancipatory processes inherent to capitalism and modernity. As is well known in the Habermasian perspective social subjects define in common the normative orientations and the moral convictions through their ability to communicative action means transforming thus, incessantly, the signifying horizon of the social world. Honneth sees in this a sort of emancipatory rationality, free of the reification and domination of instrumental reason, capable of placing the social back into the center of practice.

The critique Honneth levels against Habermas is in regards to his blindspot in the question of social justice and what moves such claims. Differently than Habermas, for whom the integration of social classes in a consensual system of legitimation for capitalism is a *fait accompli* – therefore discounting both the possibility of negativity and resistance-- Honneth insists on the presence within different social groups and social formations of conflictual attitudes fed by a reflexive understanding of injustice and oppression that have been excluded from intersubjective frames of reference and have not been publicly and openly formulated within the shared values of the bourgeois public sphere (for Habermas conflict originates in the violation of the share values of the public sphere). Honneth here echoes a fundamental contribution to critical theory, one that invests the issue of the public sphere and the formation of intersubjective frames of reference and the production of common values, memories and worldviews while taking on the the potential for subversion and social change<sup>74</sup>.

It is Habermas himself, both implicitly within the text of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and

explicitly in the preface to the French (re)edition of the same book, that recognizes the limits of his own particular understanding and characterization of the public sphere as specifically that of a bourgeois liberal ideal. “The exclusion of lower classes, mobilized culturally and politically, already provokes a pluralization of the public sphere during its formation. Side by side of the hegemonic public sphere, and connected and enmeshed to that, a ‘plebeian’ public sphere is also formed.”<sup>75</sup> While this statement does admit to the need for a reorientation of the theorization of the public sphere there is little of this reorientation in Habermas’ subsequent work.

We do, however, find an extremely productive and fruitful critique of the limitations and static conceptualization of the bourgeois public sphere in the work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge. Their Public Sphere and Experience<sup>76</sup> is a highly articulated and successful rebuke to the conceptual shortcomings of Habermas’s public sphere concept. If Habermas had imagined a universalizing political model, a public sphere in other words that would be composed of autonomous and enlightened

individuals/subjects, far from the plebeian crowd (as he himself admitted later) and their random and unstructured public expressions Negt and Kluge redress this blindspot by introducing conflict and resistance. This conceptualization in effect opens up a space of conflict between two distinct and yet interrelated public spheres forcing us to rethink the possibilities of action for the subaltern classes as well as placing at the very center of the analysis the project that is being pursued specifically through the bourgeois public sphere by dominant classes. Negt and Kluge not only underline and render visible the corruption and degeneration of the bourgeois public sphere which ultimately, within the advanced capitalist societies saturated by spectacle and images constitute nothing but a space of illusion and falsity, phantasmatic realities, and an infinite play of signifiers which ultimately do result, as Adorno has rightfully pointed out, in a withering of experience but in their calling up a 'proletarian' public sphere affirm the complete alterity of this Other sphere capable of working as an explanatory concept not only on the basis of class identities but all social subjectivities



oppressed and marginalized. It is out of this that a truly novel category and concept, that of the oppositional public sphere emerges capable of incorporating all of the oppositional subjectivities that resist their full integration into a false totality (as Adorno would say). This new form is emblematic of the political, cultural and also moral opposition to the ideological character of the established public sphere and works to redress and rearticulate the visible and the heterogeneity of experience itself always accepting of difference and the incommensurability of the instances of opposition and resistance. By accepting and championing difference within its sphere it rejects the possibility of the construction of a single unifying subject and favors the emergence of a plurality of insurgencies and forms of resistances in both the social and the cultural realm.

It's the varieties of social experiences that manifest themselves in the 'oppositional public sphere', those voices and subjectivities that were conceptually forced to occupy subaltern positions within the dominant public sphere as even a minimal questioning of their relations of oppression

would have (and did) risk to destabilize the social, cultural and political order issuing forth. This is an important way to explain why modernist and 'art' cinema practices were embraced by dominant discourses notwithstanding their apparent subversivity while other expressions, apparently more compromised with capital (due to their commodity status) never managed in their full force to be integrated – and I am thinking of the 'obscene' characterization of the popular within dominant discourses.

Negt and Kluge allow us to broach the fundamental question: what happens when those social subjectivities that have been written out, excluded, excised from the sphere of communication take action and recapture their speech outside of the officially sanctioned political and more appropriately cultural sphere? And more importantly where is that action and speech to be found? Within the texts of popular culture themselves or within those set of practices and operations performed on textual and text-like structures?

## CHAPTER 5

**“A boundary is not that at which  
something stops...the boundary is  
that from which something begins  
its presencing.”  
Martin Heidegger**

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Notions pertaining to obscenity have often been spoken of as questions relating to subjectivity, inscribing the obscene as a systemic necessity of the apparatus which are put into place by processes of subject construction. The obscene thus becomes that dialogical encounter with a self that is always already in the process of coming apart,

unraveling, becoming other as it attempts to escape the narrow confines of the death prompted irremediably with the entry into the symbolic. In this manner the obscene becomes structurally tied to the psychic processes which give a sense of doomed coherence to the position that “the clean and proper self”<sup>77</sup> acquires in its achievement of fraudulent intelligibility; the obscene is the negative side of a positivity which is destined to be constituted as lack, the impossible site in the fatal choice between meaning and being.<sup>78</sup>

These discourses inevitably take on the burden of attempting to explicate and uncover the character of things “below” or “prior to” culture; the “*beginning* preceding the word” as Julia Kristeva defines it<sup>79</sup>. Obscenity, recast as abjection in Kristeva’s discourse, thus becomes the attempt at symbolizing that ‘beginning’ before the trauma of separation -between outside and inside, self and other, subject and object, culture and nature, meaning and being- that is precipitated with the entry into language. While the lack introduced by differentiation and separation is not recuperable, obscenity nonetheless comes to assume the

role of a testimony to the vulnerability of the boundaries and divisions that are set up.

As a going beyond the distinctions of self and other, beyond the construction of difference that the entry into language precipitates, the obscene manifests its political urgency -its transformative powers. However tenuous, this political project needs to be held into perspective. It is never ultimately on the outside, just as the obscene is never ultimately successful in differentiating itself as “other”. It thus becomes, as Kristeva explains it, a (*the* ? ) threat to “one’s ‘own and clean self’, which is the underpinning of any organization constituted by exclusions and hierarchies.”<sup>80</sup>

In this encounter of subjects and objects, in the complex edification of margins, boundaries and borders which necessarily structure within them the very possibility of the internal and external -as experience of both psychic and material territories- the question at hand then starts revolving toward the dynamics of space, practices of spatial productions which perpetuate a desire, a structural necessity, of converting that which exceeds, that which is ob-scene, outside or beyond the stage of signification, the

theater of language, that which threatens one's subjective homogeneity as ontological self-confidence into modes of otherness and heterogeneity to be condemned, punished or converted in order to restore that tenuous spatial coherence which enables domination.

Is the social territorialized following the same structures as the subject? Does a homology exist between the structuration of the homogenous subject and the social symbolic system which upholds its divisions and hierarchies through rituals of separation and purification<sup>81</sup>? May the obscene be the way out of the fascist organization of being as it desanctifies that which is sanctified in order to protect the social divisions parading under the "self and clean" of the social group? A fundamental aspect of the answers to these questions should necessarily take into consideration the irruption of history and the changes in modes of production into the structure.

Deleuze and Guattari in the Anti-Oedipus<sup>82</sup> see universal history as a process of deterritorialization, understanding this movement of deterritorialization as a

passage from a codification to a decodification. The term decodification does not here designate merely a linguistic operation but the manner in which society regulates production; production which includes social and desiring production. In this light, the origin of modernity and capitalism, is seen as a generalized decodification. Old rituals, ceremonies, all the respected forms which were considered sacred disappear. Deterritorialization defines the essential movement and direction of capitalism, meaning, in short, that capitalism survives the end of history; it is the universal truth of history, a cynical system which does not call on any belief, any type of sacred truth in order to function.

Capitalism in reducing all social relations to commodity relations of universal equivalency deterritorializes desire by subverting traditional codes that limit and control social relations and production; it frees humanity from its traditional chains, from its chains of "identification" to family, tribe, state, nation. During the course of industrial modernity the differential qualities of humankind are canceled. Seen in this light capitalism is

“the one by whom the abject exists [that whose space is] never one, nor homogeneous, nor totalizable, but essentially divisible, foldable, catastrophic.”<sup>83</sup> Thanks to its cynical decodification, therefore, it should be considered a liberation. It goes on to destroy all the beliefs and all the prohibitions to which humanity has been subjected to; the reality of capitalism is the most powerful repression of desiring production ever witnessed in history. In this way, capitalism, by destroying all forms of “belonging” -through its deterritorializing functions- should be able to create the conditions for absolute happiness and well being, in short the conditions *for* being -the psychic nomadism of the individual as continuous and absolute. Then why is it not so?

Capitalism performs a final reterritorialization around itself as ritual, as signifying process and still makes its structure revolve around the spaces of values and the values of spaces.

Mary Douglas uses the metaphor of money as summing up the dynamics of ritual:

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**“Money provides a fixed, external, recognizable sign for what would be**



**confused, contradictable operations; ritual makes visible external signs of internal states. Money mediates transactions; ritual mediates experience, including social experience. Money provides a standard for measuring worth; ritual standardizes situations, and so helps to evaluate them. Money makes a link between the present and the future, so does ritual. The more we reflect on the richness of the metaphor, the more it becomes clear that this is no metaphor. Money is only an extreme and specialised type of ritual.”<sup>84</sup>**

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It is easy to see how a non-reified understanding of the concept of money and a more nuanced discernment of it in the Marxian conception of capital as process points to the direction of capitalism itself as a ritual demarcating spaces and boundaries. The intuition becomes problematic, however, where Douglas sees the perpetuation of “pollution avoidances” in modernity as the operating on the same symbolic meanings, albeit fragmented, of traditional societies. According to her, the rituals might have changed but the symbolic registers remain the same. As Kristeva puts it, such a move turns “the ‘symbolic system’ into a

secular replica of the ‘preestablished harmony’ or the ‘divine order’.”<sup>85</sup> The decodifications, the desanctifications of the modern are not discounted here.

Spatial practice however might offer some elucidation on the problem. Foucault speaks of the not entirely completed project of the desanctification of space at the hands of the networks of knowledge that however precariously have enabled us to delimit or formalize it in modernity.

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**“[O]ur life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down. These are oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between the space of leisure and that of work. All these are still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred.”<sup>86</sup>**

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Thus, we are in the realm of spatial oppositions again, as that between the internal and the external that is the founding event of the entry into language. Foucault however, individuates loci where this ordered opposition between spaces is put into crisis, not momentarily, not

through an experience of incoherence or a recognition of the structuring separation-trauma, but as part of the same relations that structure them and give them meaning. These sites have “the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect.”<sup>87</sup> Foucault designates them as “heterotopias”.

It is important to note that Foucault here is speaking of “external spaces”, physical, material places which point to their own heterogeneity, to their transgressing the most basic assumptions of oppositions, to their status as liminal, heterogeneous sites of contestation. The obscenity of these spaces thus comes in their physicality not in their linguistic, aesthetic parapraxes.

Foucault, even if not explicitly, is pointing to a set of lived, material relations which can be theorized and discussed as representing the obscene of social space. How else to characterize the sprawling peripheries of European urban centers or the inner cities of North America if not under the designation of “crisis heterotopias [...] privileged

or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis.”<sup>88</sup>

If one is to, furthermore, accept David Harvey’s proposition that “[t]o dissect the urban process in all of its fullness is to lay bare the roots of consciousness formation in the material realities of daily life”<sup>89</sup> then the possibility of arriving at an understanding of abjection, or rather, of employing the discourses on abjection and the obscene in order to understand the processes of domination in a political transformative way comes into sight. Foucault’s call for a “heterotopology”, a sort of “mythic contestation of the space in which we live” points to it.

This understanding of abjection and the obscene can help offer a critical understanding of national cinema -a discourse itself constructed and predicated upon a recognition of difference. The obscene permits the questioning of the manners in which the dominant practices of film historiography construct a homogenous body of work which are supposedly representative of a national cinematic tradition. The individuation of a “national abject” follows the

need for a theoretical investigation into the ambivalence of the “location of culture” -an exploration on how to articulate (indeed, rendering this articulation possible in itself) the liminal space of marginality in cultural production. This would mean a recasting of the categorical imperatives on which the a-critical understanding of national cinema have rested on. Thus the discourses surrounding the concentration of bodies in the urban peripheries necessarily shifts into the domain of abjection, as the migrant populations are recasting as residue and waste, the operations of power re-enacting the purification rituals described by Mary Douglas.

The obscene brings out the multi-positionality and multi-spatiality of cultural location, its opening up of a “place of hybridity [...] where the construction of a political object that is ‘new’, neither the one or the other, properly alienates political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very form of our recognition.” The casting as obscene of those practices which construct a category of “real” Italian film, where this becomes significant as one set of practices

rather than others, helps to foster a static notion of the nation as a homogeneous identity -an ontological self-confidence- silencing the theoretically (and politically) more productive conception of a process of “nationalizing”.

A return to those differences and processes of differentiation, which were put under erasure, through discursive practices are of central concern as we have previously noted in order to expose the different categories of the “national” (subjectivity, culture, space, time, communication, medium) in terms of their constructedness. The system of genres and the spaces of exhibition and the modes of consumption of popular Italian cinema propose themselves as sites of ambivalent resistance to the totalizing project of nationalism/nationalizing, a vivid example of an oppositional public sphere, an inquiry into which may point to certain theoretical ruptures capable of exploding the essentialist conception of the “universal” at the national level.

It is no wonder that these spaces have in turn been cast as “obscene” -literally, outside of the scene of the

national imaginary- as have the practices of spectatorship enacted in them and the cultural products exhibited.

Mapping out popular film reception in the urban topography/territory of the city a different theory of spectatorship, which is tightly tied to locality and class subjectivities, flying over in the face of the universal transhistorical spectator/subject, constructed by the desire to subdue social and cultural distinctions among viewers and turn them into a homogenous group of spectators, emerges. The workings of the discourses surrounding the production, regulation and construction of the national subject in the practice and historical theorizing of Italian cinema in the post-world war two years moved to gentrify the previous popular conception of audiences and their constitution as diverse and heterogenous. It is this desire and vision to construct a conception of film consumption and of the public as more comprehensive, less class-specific and even less localized that moved and affected much more than industrial paradigms and modes of production, spilling into the organization of urban spaces and of the aesthetic mechanisms of film texts themselves.

During the late sixties, the period when the social processes which have been discussed here reach their peak, Italian cinemas were divided into first run (*prima visione*), second run (*seconda visione*) and third run (*terza visione*)<sup>90</sup>.

Already this specific organization of the circuits of distribution and theatrical exhibition present themselves as tied to context and specific social processes. In fact initially, while the devastating outcomes of the war had not, as one can presume, spare the film industry of the country while simultaneously having a fundamental effect on defining the very institutional essence of what Italian national cinema was (and still is)<sup>91</sup> a powerful institution such as the church managed to keep popular exhibition circuits operative. The destruction of the productive apparatuses and structures, the dispersion of the machinery, the (temporary) gap left by the absence of state power on which the Italian film industry had traditionally relied upon after a brief initial moment of autonomous organization, the lack of a political and cultural economic organization of the field: all these negative consequences did not phase the cultural



infrastructure of the Catholic church. Thanks to its overarching organization and the development of a strategic structural control plan of intervention already firmly in place since the thirties (the go ahead had been given by the Fascist state at the time of the signing of the Concordato in 1929) the institution of the church (in its secular form and in the more specifically 'sacred') finds itself in a privileged and relatively powerful situation. It is quite revealing that this structural power is demonstrated, above and beyond any type of productive organization and capacity in their ability to control the exhibition side of the industry following the end of the war. Not only does the church control much of the remaining theaters still left standing in the rural areas and the developing suburban slums of the big cities (the borgate), they also impose -through a ratings type system devised by the Cinematographic Catholic Center, the Centro Cattolico Cinematografica (CCC)- a moral judgement on the films being distributed around the country.

At the end of the war the number of parrochial (parish) theaters is estimated at 559 across the country and they are often the only ones on which it is possible to rely

upon in order to guarantee the continuation of any sort of exhibition. This already extremely high figure will increase ten fold during the fifties, bringing the exhibition sites directly under the control of the clerical hierarchy to more than 5000<sup>92</sup>. This network, strategically disseminated on the whole territory of the peninsula, controls, particularly, the urban periphery and the rural/agricultural areas where all cultural activity is managed and organized directly by the parish in a situation of complete monopoly.

The demise of this particular form of exhibition circuits and the attending practices, as the church loses interest in film exhibition and concentrates --starting in 1953--on affirming its presence within the institutional framework and productive forces of a newly developing mass medium which promised a much more efficient and capillary communicative reach --namely television, leaves a wide open space for the development of a makeshift new form of theatrical exhibition network which maps itself --productively, aesthetically and discursively--on the social transformations and the cultural upheavals that Italian

society was undergoing during those early years of the post-war reconstruction and the explosion of the so-called ‘economic miracle’.<sup>93</sup>

Marked by the social situation, differently than the exhibition system in place in the United States, films destined to this newly developing circuit did not proceed through the various “runs” as they remained on the market. The highly stratified social segmentation of Italian society afforded the cinema industry the possibility of diversifying its products from the beginning of the industrial process, thus permitting the production of films destined directly for release for the second and third run theaters.

The dichotomy of high and low permeated the organization of texts and sites of exhibition as the high discourses of cinema, which appealed to the intellect were destined to the handful of first run theaters which were present in the urban centers of the sixteen major cities of the peninsula, while the low discourses of the body were destined to the second and third run theaters of the provinces and borgate. The expectations of distribution and

the organization of texts thus engaged each other in allocating the products on the market.

The bulk of the films being produced for the popular market were organized around a series of genres known as the “filone” (formula) films. Their existence tells us a lot about popular cinema-going in Italy and the relations between film, the construction of a unified national subject and the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion at work in the material bases of film production. A key element for their understanding is the contradictory nature of these films which could be seen both as an expression of popular culture and as a mass consumer product imposed by the interests that controlled the market. Christopher Wagstaff suggests<sup>94</sup> this dual nature. What is certain however is that the modes of consumption of the popular texts definitely structured their meanings and use values, (dis)articulating them by engaging in readings and receptions that were subversive and oppositional to the normative mode of “proper” spectatorship. Both the films and the modes of exhibition and the different practices of cinema going constitute practices articulated within the fabric of everyday

life, “spheres of circulation” that create and recreate publics and public spheres. In order to be fully grasped one needs to expand the scope of communication, broadening the understanding of the ways in which publics are constituted as well as the spaces through which communication takes place.

Wagstaff remarks on the enduring “fidelity” of the popular markets to the products destined to them. Discussing spaghetti-westerns, a genre which for a brief period of time enjoyed widespread success even in first run theaters, he notes that “by 1970, for example, spaghetti-westerns were less prominent in *prima visione* [in comparison to 1965 when a number of them were earning in excess of one billion lire in *prima visione* alone when no Hollywood western had ever made more than half of that sum] but only slightly less represented in *terza visione*.”<sup>95</sup>

It may, at this point, be suggested that the articulations of the popular genres have more to do with types of pleasures they elicited in the popular audiences, ready as they were to bypass and find refuge into the

locality of the terza visione theaters than with considerations of their political economy.

It is from within these procedures that Mikel Koven develops his configuration of what he calls 'vernacular cinema' when discussing another one of the genres that are typical of the Italian film going experience, the 'giallo'. For Koven 'vernacular cinema' is defined and characterized by "localized practices", by "a filtration process from high-art predecessors" and by "an intentional opposition to a 'high style'"<sup>96</sup>.

Patterns of cinema going by the popular audiences tended to be communal, tied to place and unconcerned with the hours of exhibition. In this manner the theater offered a temporary refuge from the restructuring of the experience of space and time that had been altered by the spectator's engagement with modernity and the urban experience. Theater going seemed to offer a manner to evade the conscription of the regimented experience of time and space and the atomization of social space.

As Wagstaff sums up the process, “the viewer (generally he) went to the cinema nearest to his house (or in rural areas, the only cinema there was) after dinner, at around ten o’clock in the evening. The program changed daily or every other day. He would talk to his friends during the showing whenever he felt like it, except during the bits of the film that grabbed his (or his friends’) attention (the film would stop anyway at an arbitrary point for an intermission). People would be coming and going and changing seats throughout the performance.”<sup>97</sup>

It is evident how the social context and function of this mode of spectatorship cannot go unnoticed. The audience of the *terza visione* narrated by Wagstaff is very different from the centered all-perceiving subject put in place by the ideological effects of psychoanalytic theory, the recession into the dream state subverted by a ludic conscious pleasure strictly tied to the material bases of the spectator’s social realm. The spectators participate actively in the narrative, have great familiarity with the “stars” and play with the plot anticipating dialogue and twists all along the performance.

*trovò una ragazza quasi impazzita, abbandonata nel deserto... per lei fu costretto ad UCCIDERE l'uomo che poteva salvarlo dall'impiccagione*



**GIULIANO GEMMA**  
in  
**ADIOS GRINGO**  
una NUOVA ECCEZIONALE STUPENDA interpretazione

GIULIANO GEMMA con EVELYN STEWART  
in  
ADIOS GRINGO  
con ROBERT CAMARDEL  
JESUS PUENTE  
e con PETER CROSS  
regia GEORGE FINLEY

INIZIO FILM. 14.30 - 16.35 - 18.30 - 20.25 - 22.30

Abadani: « Gli onorevoli ».  
Abanella: « Rio Conchos ».  
Abanera: « I morituri ».  
A.B.C.: « Il ballo delle pistole ».  
Abel: « Taggart 5.000 dollari vivo o morto ».  
Abruzzi: « Uccidete agente segreto 777 ».  
Adriano: « Voglio essere amata in un letto d'ottone ».  
Adua: « Tempesta su Ceylon ».  
Aice: « 50.000 sterline per tradire ».  
Alfieri: « 100.000 dollari per Ringo ».  
Alhambra (Zingone): « I tre da Ashiya ».  
Alpi: « 5.000 dollari sull'asso ».  
Ambrosiano: « La decima vittima ».  
Anteo: « Bette spose per sette fratelli ».  
Araldo: « La dea della città perduta ».  
Argentina: « La collina del disonore ».  
Anel: « Mezzogiorno di fida ».  
Ariosto: « Doringo ».  
Ars: « 009 missione Hong Kong ».  
Astoria: « Mondo balordo ».  
Atlantico: « Ballata selvaggia ».  
Aurora: « La decima vittima ».  
Bruzzi: « Per un pugno di dollari ».  
Cantù: « Zorro contro Maciste ».  
Carcano: « La decima vittima ».  
Centrale: « I diavoli di Spartivento ».  
Cinestazione: « Fuori da quelle mura ».  
Cittanova: « La tua pelle o la mia ».  
Cristallo: « La decima vittima ».  
Dea: « Due mafiosi contro Goldfinger ».  
Delle Stelle: « La collina del disonore ».  
Diamante: « Lord Jim ».  
Donizetti: « L'allegro mondo di Stanlio e Ollio ».  
Ducale: « Agente 077 dall'Oriente con furore ».  
Duse: « Club di gangster ».  
Eolo: « La collina del disonore ».  
Europa: « Spionaggio a Washington ».  
Farini: « Agente S35 operazione uranio ».  
Fossati: « L'uomo che non sapeva amare ».  
Gardenia: « L'uomo di Rio ».  
Giaca: « La pupa ».

Giardini: « Da 077 intrigo a Lisbona ».  
Gloria: « Tempo di guerra tempo d'amore ».  
Ideal: « Speedy Gonzales il supersonico ».  
Imperia: « La donna di paglia ».  
Istria: « Questo pazzo, pazzo, pazzo, pazzo mondo ».  
Italia: « Se non avessi più te ».  
Jolly: « Agente 077 dall'Oriente con furore ».  
Loreto: « Da 077 intrigo a Lisbona ».  
Luz: « Due mattacchioni al Moulin Rouge ».  
Magenta: « Jim il primo ».  
Marconi: « Il segno dei covate ».  
Marte: « Una Rolls Royce gialla ».  
Meda: « Il sole scotta a Ciolo ».  
Meravigli: « Thrilling ».  
Minerva: « Uccidete agente segreto 777 ».  
Modena: « Murieta John ».  
Moderno: « Superspettacoli nel mondo ».  
Museo Scienza: « Picnic alla francese ».  
Nazionale: « La collina del disonore ».  
Olimpo: « Il grande sentiero ».  
Orchidea: « Il posto delle fragole ».  
Pacini: « James Tont operazione Uno ».  
Pellico: « La dove scende il fiume ».  
Perla: « Sexy al neon ».  
Piccadilly: « La collina del disonore ».  
Pillino: « La rivolta di Frankenstein ».  
Poliziano: « 100.000 dollari per Ringo ».  
Porpora: « I due orricoli pubblici ».  
Principe: « La settimana alba ».  
Rialto: « Il trionfo dei dieci gladiatori ».  
Rosa: « Ercole l'invincibile ».  
Rossini: « Matrimonio all'italiana ».  
Roxi: « Tempo di guerra tempo d'amore ».  
Rubino: « Sotto dieci bandiere ».  
Savona: « Colpo grosso a Galata Bridge ».  
Sempione: « Veneri al sole ».  
Susa: « Una Rolls Royce gialla ».  
Venezia: « Che fine ha fatto Totò Baby? ».  
XXII Marzo: « Mondo cane N. 2 ».  
Vigentino: « I giovani leoni ».  
Volta: « I tre volti ».  
Vox: « La collina del disonore ».  
Zara: « Le pistole non discutono ».  
Zodiaco: « Sette uomini d'oro ».

The image above shows the way in which the 'cinema page' of local Rome newspaper indicated theaters, screening hours and the films themselves. To note that there are no



markers of place and time nor any details on the films themselves.

Seen as sites of “heterogeneous”<sup>98</sup> aggregation unconnected to the real world, the theaters of the borgata resemble spaces of “perpetual decanonization” like those found in the fairs and carnivals theorized by Bakhtin<sup>99</sup>. Placed outside of the nationalized spaces of the urban centers, the spaces of popular film exhibition are accordingly constructed as sites of pleasure in which the modes of spectatorship enacted in them participated in processes which were local, festive and communal -in open contrast to the regimented spectatorship prescribed by the pedagogic discourses of national cinema. As Robert Stam notes, carnival can be viewed as “the oppositional culture of the oppressed, a countermodel of cultural production and desire. It offers a view of the official world as seen from below -not the mere disruption of etiquette but a symbolic, anticipatory overthrow of oppressive social structures [...] It is ecstatic collectivity.”<sup>100</sup> Through the foregrounding of social overturning and the counterhegemonic subversion of

established power, carnival refuses “high art’s sublimation” offering “a strategy of reduction and degradation, which uses obscenity, scatology, burlesque, and caricature to turn upside down all the forms and values by which, in Pierre Bourdieu’s words <sup>101</sup>, ‘the dominant group project and recognize their sublimity’.”<sup>102</sup>

As in the carnivalesque, with its celebration of the “excessive body”, the grotesque, of “orifices”, “protuberances”, and the “lower bodily stratum”, the popular film texts which were exhibited in the carnival like atmosphere of the peripheral theaters evaded the processes of formation of middle class identity and culture proposing, instead of the authenticating discourses of national identity, a series of generic products that were more concerned with the low -slapstick comedies concerned with flatulence, horror films delving on bodily secretions and the material body, pseudo-pornographic gazing into orifices and the immediacy and disproportion of spaghetti westerns- than the high, intellect oriented, bourgeois culture.

The hierarchical organization of the texts produced by the national cinema industry thus replicated both the social

division implied in their production and the configuration of the sites of exhibition to which the texts were distributed to. For every Last Tango in Paris (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) there was a Last Tango in Zagarolo (Nando Cicero, 1973). Not even PierPaolo Pasolini, the “poet of the sub-proletariat” was spared. While his early films (Accattone, 1961; Mamma Roma, 1961) were intended to speak for the popular classes and gathered no commercial success, his “Trilogy of Life”, the adaption of “classical” literary texts The Decameron (1971), The Canterbury Tales (1972), and The Arabian Nights (1974), through their carnivalesque aesthetic, managed to speak to the popular classes, The Decameron alone grossing over 4 billion liras<sup>103</sup> and still playing in the terza visione theaters in 1974.<sup>104</sup> True to it’s “generic” appeal The Decameron and the other three were followed by a host of spin-off’s --the film functioned as a veritable 'capostipite of a fruitful 'filone'-- with improbable titles as Decameron 2 (Mino Guerrini, 1972), Decameron Proibitissimo (Franco Martinelli, 1972), Decameroticus (PierGiorgio Ferretti, 1974), Decameron '300 (Mario Stefani, 1972), Le Calde Notti del Decameron (GianPaolo Callegari,

1972), L'Aretino nei suoi ragionamenti sulle Cortigiane, le Maritate e i Cornuti Contenti (Enrico Bomba, 1972), Canterbury Proibito (Italo Alfaro, 1972), I Racconti di Viterbury (Edoardo Re, 1973), and the list goes on...

An engagement with obscenity and abjection in discussing the construction of a homogeneous national identity points to productive ways in which to un-read and un-map (in material and psychic terms) a conception of cultural analysis and cultural propriety which constructs a fundamentalizing conception of a homogeneous national culture.

Discussing the obscene in the national thus becomes a looking into the mirror, which Lacan reminds us, is maybe that spatial situation which gives rise to the greatest number of conflicts. The aesthetics of the obscene brings out this conflict, in the same manner as the discourses on obscenity and the casting of a “something other” attempts to render this conflict reassuring. The discourse on national cinema, concerned as it is in resolving the inversion of the

image of a national body in the mirror as the “correct” ordering of that body limits the recognition of the constructedness of its own discourses. As the obscene spills into the social, as the mirror itself regains and occupies its physical space, “it makes the place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.”

*The outside is elaborated by means of a projection from within....and the border of discourse is pierced.*

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## CHAPTER 6

**"The metropolis reveals itself as one of those great historical formations in which opposing streams which enclose life unfold, as well as join one another with equal right. However, in this process the currents of life, whether their individual phenomena touch us sympathetically or antipathetically, entirely transcend the sphere for which the judge's attitude is appropriate. ... it is not our task either to accuse or to pardon, but only to understand."**

**Simmel,**

**"The Metropolis and Mental Life"**

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Through the dynamics of popular film exhibition and the types of films destined to their circuits the way in which genre films –and ‘genre’ culture more broadly—constitute one of the

most critical sites through which to think about the reproduction of social relations and the circulation of capital (both economic and cultural). In no small part, because genre films actually do much better what many have wanted to envision as the critical labor of more minimal, subtractive cultural objects, namely the European art film. In fact the cultural interchanges and common concerns, if not literal repetitions among post-war Italian art film, exploitation and popular cinema are many and clearly articulated. As discussed above it is primarily the critical discourses that keep films that otherwise would be historically and thematically in close proximity at arm's length. Genre films, and particularly the characteristic texts belonging to the *filoni* in Italian cinema and Art films seem to both participate in the injunction toward minimal difference, the injunction to make *more of the same* that must be simultaneously commensurable enough with what came before so as to be recognized and used that way and yet different enough to justify, in this case, someone not merely rescreening *Cabiria* for 80 years.

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Another way to theoretically frame the question is through the recognition that film genres have histories. In a way one can go to the extent as saying that film genres constitute the documents/events of the history of film or, to reverse that, begin by asserting that the history of film is necessarily the history of film genres. Making such a statement, and through a theoretical engagement with what its implications are, might provide a working framework from which one could rescue the relative disrepute the generic aspect of film practice has always encountered --a going beyond thinking that genre necessarily is a banalizing mechanism unless it is touched by the golden hand of a recognized "author", who, through a particular (and vaguely defined) "artistic" sensibility and vision, breathes life into genre's formulaic and industrial aspect. On the contrary, the generic nature of filmic production has always been a fundamental aspect for an understanding of the cinema as a cultural practice which is *both* industrial and popular.

Commonly, genres are those set of rules and conventions that allow a filmmaker (or the industry) to use "stabilized" communicative formulas and the spectator to



organize a certain system of expectations when confronting a film text. The agreement between the production and reception ends may shift between a definition in terms of the recurrent use of figures at the level of characters and at the level of setting and mise-en-scene, and through the employment of fixed themes, certain styles or extra-filmic solutions such as the employment of recurring actors. In other words, genres mediate the relationship between producers and viewers at a level of formal elements (figures, characters, themes, procedures) and ties these with a social/desiring function as they negotiate the pleasure of understanding, decipherment and recognition on the part of the spectator.

Genres need to be understood as a negotiation between these two aspects of a medium's communicative aspect. This aspect points to a going beyond a more ancient view (going as far back as Aristotle's Poetics) which emphasized a certain understanding of genre as an effect of the process of production, making generic boundaries necessary for poetic production, and a more contemporary understanding which strives to define genre as a function of

something outside of the production aspect: either the formalistic strategy of isolating specific textual features in order to define genre (therefore genre is function of the text) or in a more reader/spectator response paradigm where readers and conventions assign genres to texts.

While this last understanding does point to the specific historicity of genres (being defined in terms of reader/spectator responses necessarily must open the way for an understanding of genres as not permanent nor transcendental), there is still a danger of assigning too much agency to the reception end of the communicative equation, not taking into consideration the purely political economic function of genres (especially in a medium like the cinema) nor the specific textual strategies and solutions that the generic text puts into play. It is interesting to note, however, how the positions that are taken in terms of genre (genres as rules, genres as species, genres as patterns of textual features and genres as reader conventions) correspond to the positions that are encountered in literary and cinema studies in the debate about the location of

textual meaning (authorial intention, the work's historical context, the text itself, or in the reader/spectator).

What is most often left behind in these debates, however, is the fact that (if one were to extend the parallelism between the debates on genre and the debates on the location of meaning in texts) meaning properly understood does not reside solely in the text but rather in the relations between texts. Generic texts therefore exist as such not in isolation (of each other or from inter-textual encounters between different genres) but as a system of difference between other generic texts (which are themselves defined in opposition to others) and other texts classified as belonging to the same genre. Furthermore the difference is not only synchronic (between texts of the same period) but also diachronic (between texts of other historical periods and times). The historicity of genres is therefore offered up in this initial understanding: genres are not some reified object which is arbitrarily assigned to texts (be it by authors, producers, readers or critics); rather genre must be seen as a process as it constitutes itself historically, both synchronically and diachronically.

This (historical in itself) trajectory of opening up thinking about genres is reflected in Rick Altman's development of his initial genre theory: from his "semantic/syntactic"<sup>105</sup> approach, where the historicity of genres was seen as primarily residing in the various organizations of the formal levels of a text (the semantic aspect, which included characters, settings, and actions, and the syntactic, which includes the structural organization of the narrative and the actantial function of the characters) to the more recent "ten theses" on genre which exemplify his vision of the "constellated communities" that make up genres in their processes. In other words, if the semantic/syntactic approach understood the transformation of genres as being engendered by a formal transformation of one of the textual features, so that a genre is transformed through the alteration of one of the levels of the text, in his more recent work the transformational powers of genres are relocated so that generic shifts don't reside only in the textual features but are also a product of the interaction of the spectating/reading communities with the texts and of texts among themselves as they participate in

defining each other on the basis of a negation (that which they are not).

Such a view of generic shifts is exemplified in Fredric Jameson's position in terms of an understanding of "generic systems", where such systems form some kind of totality (understood in the Marxist sense) as the forms and strategies employed both structurally and at the level of narratives give voice to a certain discourse at the service of an emerging hegemonic class. Genre systems, according to Jameson, therefore, assert a view of the world through the articulation of a totality. It is in the understanding of the generic system therefore that the idea of history resides. The history of a medium and of its imposition of a world view (a certain way of "looking", with all of the overtones that such a term has in an audio-visual medium like the cinema) cannot happen if not in the dialectical and/or dialogic opposition between genre systems as they come to represent the struggle for hegemony<sup>106</sup>.

Film genres, therefore, do have histories and they are histories that need to be articulated as histories of genre systems rather than that of single discrete genres. It is as a

system that genres organize their world view, it is as a system that genres come to have histories, histories which are then deployed to strengthen one constellation of genres over another and it is as a system that a hierarchization of single genres (as they become reified and stabilized discursively) takes place in order to impose a certain system of values and distinctions, going on to impinge on the creation of cultural hierarchies inside of a social formation. It is, furthermore, through the creation of generic systems that discursively certain genres are allowed to evade the stigma of belonging to a genre, their "non-genericness" a proof of their cultural distinction.

Film genre histories, therefore, written as the history of genre systems (genre systems which provide the possibility of the production of a totality) can articulate a different aspect of a totality, a totality that is produced through the relation of the texts that produce it and through an analysis of the engagement that the "constellated communities" which Altman talks about (or the "reading formations" that Tony Bennett articulates in his essay "Texts in History"<sup>107</sup>) have with specific systems at specific historical

conjunctures. In this way the generic process will point to its underlining and necessary instability, permitting a possible rewriting/re-presentation of the totality in opposition to the hegemonic one in place.

It is in this way then that our initial assertion --the history of film is necessarily the history of film genres-- can be better understood. Film genres have histories as part of genre systems, and it is these systems that constitute the narrative of a general film history in determinate historical conjunctures. The configuration, classification and ordering of genres therefore works to produce a history as these classifications are ordered in specific sequences in order to provide some form of story for the evolution of genres in particular and histories in general.

Derrida writes of the "law of genre" as something that simultaneously is necessary and futile. Classification of texts as part of genres is necessary in order to close off the proliferation of meaning that each text has but that same proliferation of meaning is what impedes a definite classification, as the multivocality of texts necessarily

exceed any type of generic classification and therefore exceed the genre itself<sup>108</sup>.

Derrida's remarks point to how individual texts *participate* in the generic process but don't *belong* to it. What he misses in designating genre theory as futile is the productivity of a historical inquiry of the types of participation that is involved in specific works and of the participation of genre systems in organizing the "vision" that enable the writing of certain histories. Derrida says that genre theory is futile because no sooner does one designate a text as belonging to a genre that the text exceeds it. That is, as soon as a genre is set up it is immediately ready to be undone and come unraveled. What Derrida misses, of course, is that this which he is explaining is a historical process and that an inquiry into what has been termed the "generic instability" and "generic transformativity" both at the level of individual genres or at level of genre systems (which again are organized both synchronically and diachronically) can open up ways of re-presenting different articulations and different voices.



The productivity of seeing genres as both systems and as process, of concentrating on generic instability and on the ways in which genres are written and un-written come to the forefront when one sees generic tranformativity intersect with the historicity of cultural distinctions and the various designations of cultural productions/products as high and low.

Just as the high and low distinction is mutually constituted (or constituted in a negative relation to the other), so are genres. There is much to be learned and analyzed in the ways certain generic "mutations" come to assume their "place" in the hierarchy of cultural value and how these spatial configurations transform themselves in different historical conjunctures. Just like values are always actively defined with respect to an opposing class in the social structure, a study of generic processes and generic instability, like a study of cultural distinctions, would permit a closer look at how a dominant ideology legitimizes its own totality (and therefore its own generic system). A look at the silences, the unexplored possibilities and the unraveling of generic distinctions might on the other hand

work to undermine that totality and produce other totalities in its opposition.

Seen in this light, then, genre theory and the history of the process of genres cannot be forgotten when looking at the history of film.

A film and *a* reading does not make sense as *a* single film but only as one passage among a line of repetitions within a tremendous spree of self-cannibalizing, internally recycling films. It is here also that the full distinction and specificity of the genre system operating within the context of Italian popular cinema makes itself visible. It is in fact not as genre films that these repetitions gain intelligibility and become readable but it is in their precise terms as a cinematic *filone* something specific and particular to the socio-cultural and industrial context of Italian national cinema.

What become clear also is how genre is a problematic category to consider and class the types of films that

succeed one another during this most transformative period.

A *filone* is distinct from a genre in the sense of westerns, horror, or the crime film or even something more specific to Italian film and literary culture like the *giallo*. A *filone* is best understood in its literal translation, as a thread or a line or even more literally as a seam or vein in the way one would use it within the context of mining or maybe more clearly an distribuary/tributary or an 'affluent' capable as this term is to render the image of a river and its offshoots and sources. This understanding in fact permits to clearly demarcate the fluvial nature of the production of film tied to a *filone*, with currents which deviate or rejoin the main stem of production and the idea of inscribing a *filone* as having a clear point of origin.

A *filone* is distinct in that while the *filone* absorbs the techniques of many cinemas it, unlike our discussion of genres and their genealogy, emerges from a very precise point, often from a single film that is a box office smash. It is for this reason that films belonging to a *filone* do not necessarily exhibit the varieties of generic conventions that

shift and break. The so-called '*capostipite*' of a *filone*, that single film that is at the origin of the *filone* becomes a template that is repeated with minimal difference over a relatively short period of time, innumerable times. In the case of the *poliziottesco* you have over 110 films made broadly in the years between 1973 and 1978. These are not serials –they do not have the markers of sequels— and unlike genres they allow for a far more restricted range of play. They do nevertheless accommodate a wide range of economic capacity as producers from across the industry spectrum, from big studios down to local one-offs attack the 'vein' until it is exhausted. In fact it is precisely the predominance of these small production companies rather than the presence of large firms capable of functioning as a 'system' –that is the impossibility of a well articulated and mature studio system—that nourished the logic of the genres system and the *filoni* in the history of the Italian film industry. Through an often very precarious system of financing their films one by one (rather than in accordance to more long term industrial production plans as was the case in the Hollywood studio system) risk taking was

something not considered. The success of a film –or at least it's expected box office success which gave rise to what Kim Newman calls 'premature emulation'<sup>109</sup>—encouraged what would have been considered safe investments in imitations, producers always poised to jump on the bandwagon as it was careening down the path before overproduction or the inevitable decrease in profit margins took over and attention was diverted towards a new 'tributary' capable of finding an audience for itself.

In fact as much as the *filone* has a precise starting point, the so-called *capostipite*, it also has a very clear ending (despite the stragglers) as well as a clearly demonstrable dose of exhaustion that comes folded into the fabric of the formal characteristics of the films themselves as they either do it again –just cheaper and faster—or try with rare success to deviate one of the sub elements into a new coherent *filone*. Derrida's law of genre might be productively applied here as a way to describe the transformation of a *filone* into some kind of ersatz-genre capable of both originating and subsequently linking itself into a system. To stretch the fluvial metaphor while some

tributaries link back into the main stem of the river those that don't simply die without every reaching the ocean.

Serge Daney in a Cahiers du Cinema review of Sergio Leone's Once Upon A Time in the West wrote that the Leone films "constitute the first attempt of some consequence at a critical cinema (cinema critique) that is no longer in direct contact with a reality but instead it is with a genre, a cinematographic tradition, a global text, the only one that has known a global diffusion: the western. And that's no small thing."<sup>110</sup> For Daney this is not something that could have happened in the US. Hollywood cinema could have a critical sense but it could not have been a critical cinema per se. For that one needed to be 'outside'. But where? "In one of those rare countries that possessed a cinema that is serial, parallel, traditional and popular: Italy. Or more precisely Cinecitta at the precise moment when the Peplum (the 'sword and sandal' filone) was falling, threatened by its own parodies (Sergio Leone, again)." Daney continues, "the essential was there not because at a certain point some demiurge had decided one day to make a cinema that was

critical, subversive and vaguely political but because this cinema was above all or in the last analysis the sole product of an economic evolution, it happened only so that Cinecittà could reinvest its capital in a new genre of films, it had to amortize.”

For Daney the point was that in any other context a ‘B-cinema’ possesses a critical sense because of its industrial and cultural status, because it bears the cinema at its most explicitly and grossly commercial, thus giving rise to “a sort of lumpen cinema”. But it is only when this lumpen cinema takes stock of itself, where it develops a level of self-reflexivity not only in terms of its aesthetic and formal characteristics but precisely in terms of its position in a hierarchy of cultural values that it becomes a critical cinema. This lumpen cinema takes itself as the material “effecting under the mask of old forms, therefore without renouncing their popular character, a euphoric labor of deconstruction.” As such they “extenuate the habitual rhetoric of the western to make of this over extension the equivalent of a negation.” And that figure, the overextension as the equivalent of a productive negation (echoes of critical

theory and the critique of spectacular society) is at the heart or should be at the heart of any reflection on the system of genres and of the filoni.

While Daney speaks of Leone's Once Upon A Time in the West, a 'mature' film coming at the tail end of his successful run of westerns, the sense of the critical is present from the very beginning, at the origin of his engagement with the filone. Rather than falling into the typical view from high 'above' the cultural hierarchy, right into the trap of characterizing the genre of spaghetti westerns for what they are not –classical westerns or worst yet auteur films—forcing one to speak of the films in terms of their critical stance towards the dominant models and therefore simply as debased and unsuccessful imitations, it would be much more productive to look at them in their historical, social and industrial specificity, as products of the both the industrial organization of the Italian film industry at the time in which this particular genre prospered and as a form of popular cultural expression engaged with the socio-cultural context at a determined historical moment.



First of all the spaghetti westerns where at the center of the industrial rebirth of the Italian film industry during the economic boom. The year Fistful of Dollars was produced, 1964, the industry peaks and 290 films will be produced bearing an Italian 'flag'. The trend was on an upward slope since the final years of the 1950s, coinciding with the 'boom' as production dramatically increased from the 160 films produced in 1960 to the 205 in 1961, 245 in 1962 and 230 in 1963. If 1964 is a peak year it is not followed by a crisis in the productive capacity of the newly reconstituted industry as production remains well above the 200 films per year mark until the crisis of the late seventies.

It is not just a question of films being produced but of the ability of national products to take in increasingly large proportions of the box office revenue. In 1957 for example national film production, squashed by the arrival of the backlogged Hollywood products that had been excluded from distribution since fascism and the war years, merely took in 27% of total box office revenues. In 1958 this is up to 31% and in 1959 to 40%. In 1969 national film production reaches 62% of total revenues and by the 1971-

1972 cinematic season peaks at 65%. The take of Hollywood product as one can imagine goes in the opposite direction from the 60% revenue collected in the early 1960s to merely 30% in the late 1970s. It is not until the demise of the industrial system based around the *filoni* and the attendant exhibition and exploitative practices that Hollywood returns to dominate the audiovisual landscape<sup>111</sup>. Consider that 450 ‘spaghetti westerns’ were produced in Italy between 1964 and 1978.

Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes here, it is in their formal make up that the films reveal their role in the restructuring of social relations and social identities. It is here that its identity as a critical cinema in Daney’s formulation makes itself felt.

Fistful of Dollars reveals its immediate concerns with the image as such, with spectacle itself as this is organized not in the service of the narrative nor in terms of a faithfulness to the world and the Real. What Leone wants most of all is to reflect on the play of looks that engages spectator and characters to the actions unfolding on the screen. Rather than question vision there is an almost

visceral attachment to the power of looking and the possibilities of spectacular excess that the cinema offers. Leone offers a vision from below, interested in materiality, with bodies and the spectacle that bodies beaten to a pulp offer. There is a concern with the low, to affect, always approaching something that is unspeakable in its excessive nature, obscene, literally rather than the sublime of art cinema. This is finally a concern with the obscene in its theoretical guise as the off screen and off scene, distant from Pasolini's high literary concerns for example. *Fistful of Dollars* in fact proceeds through the techniques of the *commedia dell'arte*. Leone was in fact accused of plagiarizing Akira Kurosawa's Yojimbo (1961)(which was itself an 'adaptation' of Red Harvest a Dashiell Hammett novel from 1929). His defense was that his film had no relation to Kurosawa or Hammett and instead came directly from Carlo Goldoni and his Arlecchino, servo di due padroni, a story of a man caught between two groups fighting for power and winning by playing them one against the other.

There is a moment in the film where the ‘man with no name’ played by Clint Eastwood is first beaten to a pulp and manages to drag himself and find refuge and a hiding place inside a newly constructed coffin. With the help of the town’s coffin maker, who constitutes an ambiguous comic relief character as he functions as sidekick to the running gag of counting the dead but also as the one closest to death itself, while trying to make his getaway from the warring factions in the no-man’s land town in which he was pitching his two bosses one against the other (like Goldoni’s *Arlecchino*), the Man-with-no-name pauses his escape as the Rojas family attacks the Baxters with an inordinate amount of violence. “Stop, I want to look at this” he says. In his battered body, unable to move both because of the severe violence he had been subjected to and for the binding confines of the coffin in which he is hiding, through a small opening in the coffin lid he watches –as we watch with him—the excessive spectacle of violence that unfolds in front of his eyes. The Man-with-no-name is the prototype film spectator, beaten to a pulp, unable to move, capable of only looking and shifting from the different registers of

scopophilic pleasure that simply looking at the scene that unfolds. It is only at the end of the violence, with the final, melodramatic and choreographed death of the entire Baxter clan that the Man-with-no-name, the narrative and the spectator can look away and move on. "Show is over, let's get out of here."

Leaving Daney behind, if the Spaghetti Western took its own generic conditions as its material what then of the poliziotteschi which originate within this already serial and critical cinema, which takes this critical cinema as its own raw material?

It is not the subject matter of genre films per se that illuminates the social relations and landscapes of the nation but rather their basic injunction --to make more of the same with enough minimal difference so as to not be exactly the same. It is from that grounding principle that they bear on, and work out, the simple operation that lies behind economic and ideological production as such: the constant generation of more and, crucially, the strange and hostile excess that constantly threatens that generation.

If the point of a critical realism is to be adequate to, and transformed by, the material it considers, then one has to reckon with how dramatic shifts in the city and in its affective, social, and especially political landscape require different modes of registering it. The hurried and ridiculous trajectories through the city, catching partial glimpses of political graffiti, and especially between its *borgate*, its *grattacieli*, and its *palazzi* and antelitteram non-places gives us a vision of the city proper to its fraught moment, the "fractured city"<sup>112</sup> stitched together in the midst of chasing a perp. Just like a beaten body of a nameless man, rendered immobile and incapable of action if not through the act of looking at a spectacle of violence, caught between 'two bosses' in a non-place at the edge of the world.

## CHAPTER 7

### Technologies of Memory

***“Memory is not a constantly accessible copy of the different facts of our life, but an oblivion from which, at random moments, present resemblances enable us to***

***resuscitate                      dead***  
***recollections.”***  
***-Proust, La Prisonniere;***  
***RTP***

Proust's quote above becomes all the more significant if one analyzes the overwhelming preoccupation with memory, history and the past that has openly gripped the spectrum of contemporary life in Italy during the past three decades but that has operated beneath the surface for a much longer time. The constant referral to a "loss of memory" is paradoxical in a political, cultural and social climate that has made of the problematization of memory and the ways of writing the past a central element of public debate and of both cultural and political life. The current Italian scene has been rift with conflicting discourses, all competing for a "correct" or just simply more persuasive interpretation of the past given that 'truth' seems to have become explicitly discounted in favor of a much more open and declared desire to impose opposing interpretations on social, political, economic, cultural and lately judicial events. The desire to re-write history, to censure history, to start again (hopefully, for some, on a blank slate, forgetting



what was never remembered because never understood) belie the coexistence of opposing tendencies now claiming for a psychoanalytic need to forget or pushing for an absolute remembrance. Remembrance and forgetting -- history, or more precisely historiography, if we are to understand history in itself as an ineffable abstraction which needs a "writing", a "narration" in the present for it to be actualized-- have become politically charged and unstable categories not that they were not before, but the amount of their "voltage" and the extent of their instability has taken a gigantic leap raising the question of what to remember, who remembers what and maybe more importantly, *how* to remember. In short, the question of how to know and validate one's past. This urge to know has inserted itself within a social and political sphere increasingly dominated by the mass media as the main circuit for the dissemination of popular and mass culture rendering in other words the symbolic domain as the privileged arena for the staging of the conflict.

It might bear repeating once more: memory has a history. As much as every social formation and cultural identity remembers its past it is the manner in which this culture performs and sustains this recollection that is at once distinctive and diagnostic.

In short, memory in Italy has become problematized: the past has become a contested terrain in which narratives of people excluded from traditional accounts –if previously much of the debate was centered on an aggressive historical revisionism of the war and immediate post-war period, there are necessarily a myriad voices that come into play following this contestation: regional and local subjectivities, political and cultural subjects up to recently relegated in a ring of fire for heretics, cultural hierarchies, migration, immigration, class identities, etc-- have begun to be articulated in a complex dialogue with those unproblematically inscribed into the dominant narrative and tradition. As Richard Terdiman argues in Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis<sup>113</sup>, any rapid alteration of the givens of the present places a society's connection with its past under pressure --even though, and this I will argue

here, it is not the connection with a static past that is put under pressure but rather the ways in which that past is written and constructed. So, while in the recent past, the uncertain status of the relations with the past has become especially intense, this instability is experienced as an insecurity of one's culture's involvement with its past[, "*the perturbation of the link to their own inheritance*".] Terdiman characterizes this destabilization as a "memory crisis". In much the same manner, the public debate on the strains that historical narratives are encountering in Italy in the past years has been centered on this "crisis", the more optimistic of commentators treating it as a temporary imbalance which should or will be corrected through careful interventions --seminars of former partisans speaking at middle-schools are quite popular these days-- while the more pessimistic predicting the usual "end of history". "Crisis" however would imply an objective "past" which would be readily accessible had the "crisis" not obscured the correct functioning of memory --and a past that will be made accessible again once the crisis is overcome and

resolved. As noted previously the past and the memory are always in trouble, in crisis, complicated.

If the content of the past and of the memory is in crisis, rift with conflict and contradiction then the formal organization of the representations of the past –particularly those that flow through the channels of mass culture and in particular within the cinematic realm becomes an increasingly privileged point of observation for these changes and shifts. Not surprisingly then, this concern with a ‘rewriting’ of history is not simply significant and intelligible in function of the particular stories that are being told –the events that are being chosen for narrative, even though, as we will see, these do indicate something fundamental and specific and much can be said about this particular aspect --but in terms of the structural organization and formal construction of the texts and the relations they set up between their referents and their signifying practices and discourses.

In other words this has not appeared so much precisely a “memory crisis” being played out, nor so much a

rewriting of history itself, but rather a reconfiguration of the understanding of history itself. Not so much history being rewritten but rather the manner in which the writing of history has been understood is what is under pressure here, that which is transforming itself, and as a consequence, transforming its object of inquiry --the past-- along with it.

There are a particular batch of films produced in the late 1980s to the mid-1990s --films such as Lizzani's Celluloide, Amelio's Lamerica, Calopresti's La Seconda Volta, Tullio-Giordana's Pasolini: Una Storia Italiana, Martinelli's Porzus --albeit in relation to quite different events and in very individual manners --that become some of the most visible manifestations of this changing narrative of history. In this resurgence of films that take the nation's past as their subject are reflected the various strategies that are being employed in the larger spectrum of contemporary life. The "image of history" that is being offered in these films intersect and compete with the discourses about history and memory both within and across national film practices and in both mainstream cultural production and

more “marginal” expressions. Along with a whole area of recently produced literary historical narratives these films work hard to establish a new space of history.

All examples of historical narratives, these films participate directly in the writing of history so much that they become historiographic apparatuses in their own right. As historical narratives they present us with what Pierre Sorlin identifies as a “view of the present embedded in a picture of the past” and like other historical films they come to be defined as such in terms of a discipline that is completely outside of the cinema with all of the controversy that such a move brings with it.

Much of what has been written on these films has centered around the legitimacy of cinematic interpretations of the past and of holding films to standards of authenticity and “correctness”. Yet, these films employ strategies which differentiate them from previous historical representations or specific films which have attempted to tackle the problem of history through the medium of the cinema.

Much of the critical historiography which has been practiced in the Italian cinema has situated itself as an open polemic against a historicist pretension of delivering, recovering and reconstructing the “real past”. The critical histories constructed by films such as Bertolucci’s La Strategia del Ragno and Il Conformista, the Taviani’s Allonsanfan, Cavani’s Il Portiere di Notte, Rosi’s Salvatore Giuliano or any of the historical films by Visconti --just to name a few-- have always been in opposition to the possibility of gaining a positive knowledge about the past through an empiricist investigation of events and facts. In these films, “the past” as a principle of validation is rejected and any reconstruction of that past is seen as a discursive activity shaped by the intricacies of power and knowledge. With their concerns surrounding absent referents the pretensions of historicism are countered by the idea that the “real past” is not recoverable if not in fictionalized form, thus bestowing on any form of historicist work the status of fiction which has little to offer if not a reflection on the present.<sup>114</sup>

Celluloide, Pasolini: Una Storia Italiana,: it is at the level of representations -and at the level of the traces of the past that they choose to engage with- that these films differ from their generic predecessors. Thinking through these films in terms of their supposed “accuracy” and “faithfulness” would necessarily miss the point, even though, interestingly enough, such an operation would at the same time reveal the significance of the stakes on the table. The blurring of fact and fiction in films like Pasolini and Celluloide for example point to the fact that it is possible to treat an historical event as if there were no limits as to what could legitimately be said about it, thereby bringing under question the very principle of objectivity as the basis for which one might discriminate between truth on the one side and myth, ideology, illusion and lie on the other. Tullio Giordana in fact goes through the evidence of Pasolini’s murder inventing evidence that supports his thesis or conspiracy, suppressing all evidence that conflicts with it, directing the film with an aggressive style --flashing forward, flashing backward, cross-cutting relentlessly, shooting in close-up, blurring, obfuscating, all in the service



of his argument. It is not for nothing that Pasolini has mockingly been referred to as the “Italian JFK” --reinforcing a long established tradition of “second degree” criticism where the greatest insult is to accuse a film of being “americanized”. Like Oliver Stone’s film it is not simply the slanting of the evidence concerning the two assassinations that has been deemed offensive --but the form itself of the film(s), their stylization managing to distort --apparently-- even those events whose occurrence can be established on the basis of historical evidence.

The erosion of the presumed boundary between factual and fictional discourses has been the subject of much anguished commentary. As Caryn James writes, however, “such responses naively assume that an accumulation of facts equals truth. But a collection of facts is no more than an almanac. History is the interpretation of those facts.”

In other words, what is at issue in such films is not so much the facts of the matter regarding such events but the different possible meanings that such facts can be construed as bearing. The seemingly permeable border between imaginative and realistic discourses is necessarily

permeable, for historical narrative films deliver not the “real” of the historical past but rather a mental conception of it, a system of discursive representations --not simply a series of images which confess the state of things (as much of Italian film has been talked about, unfortunately) but rather as they confess the visible of a context, that which appears to be representable-- in which speculation, hypothesis and dramatic ordering and shaping closely inform the work of historical reconstruction and analysis. Social power and influence are in fact the real issue here, the one that is most troubling to critics of historical films --the films ultimately are meaningful, not because of their breaking down the boundaries between fiction and history but because of their use of fiction to challenge history’s accepted views.

Pasolini and Celluloide differ from their generic prototypes --those modernist works of historical representation in Italian cinema-- by a placing in abeyance the distinction between the real and the imaginary. Everything is presented as if it were of the same ontological order, both real and imaginary --realistically imaginary or imaginarily real, with the result that the referential function

of the images of events is broken down. In Celluloide, for example, Pina's murder by the Nazis, as she runs yelling "Francesco!" is foreshadowed by Anna Magnani (or better, Lina Sastri playing Anna Magnani) running after her lover who has just left her. In this breaking down of the barrier between the real and the imaginary (emblematic in Celluloide that the "real" is in fact a representation, namely the film, Roma Citta' Aperta) Lizzani in fact chronicles the passage from one order of representations to another --from the pre-war melodrama to neo-realism so that the object of history inquired is neither the "story" of Open City nor the history of post-war Italy but an in between that is accessible only through representations. Stylistically, the film itself is shot in the high-melo' style of a white telephone film. Lizzani's Celluloide, based on the novel by Ugo Pirro is, as should be clear by now, the "making of" Roma Citta' Aperta. The film also employs stylistic and formal devices to make its point. The construction from the present is foregrounded by the use of the flashback as bookends where we see the actors playing the various Anna Magnani, Aldo Fabrizi, Roberto Rossellini, Sergio Amidei, Maria Michi in make-up

at Cinecitta', getting ready to put a fiction on the scene in order to tell of history.

Ultimately, what these films put into play is a breaking down of the distinction between history and what people "make up", in other words, as viewing all events as equally imaginary, at least insofar as they are represented. In a sense this is the breakdown of a traditional humanistic historiography. The historical event in Pasolini --the assassination of an Italian poet, essayist, novelist, filmmaker-- has been dissolved as an object of a respectably scientific knowledge. Such events can serve as contents of bodies of information, but as possible objects of a knowledge of history that might lay claim to the status of scientific lore, they are of interest only as elements of a statistical series. Indeed, such singular events as the assassination of a public figure are worthy of study only as a hypothetical presupposition necessary to the constitution of a documentary record whose inconsistencies, contradictions, gaps and distortions of the event presumed to be their common referent itself moves to the fore as the principal object of investigation. As for such singular events

of the past, the only thing that can be said about them is that they occurred at particular times and places. It is at the level of their meanings that the semiotic struggle is being fought: the events can be exploded --and one here need only think of something like the Rodney King video as a paradigmatic example-- and their very precision and detail in the imagistic representation is what throws it open wide to a variety of interpretations of “what was really going on.”

Such strategies have also seeped out of narrative film to invest other generic conventions. A video-documentary which was given out in the mid-90s with the *Corriere della Sera* on the anniversary of Moro’s kidnapping, Aldo Moro: 55 giorni di passione, begins with the footage of Giuseppe Ferrara’s Il Caso Moro, a film that could be seen as one of the precursors of this new way of constructing historical argument. Although organized linearly, Ferrara used television journalists to re-enact newscasts and archival footage of politicians during the fifty-five days of the kidnapping to complement his “fictional” characters.

What is ultimately at stake is a move from an attempt at a domination of the categories of time to those of space through the image. And it is only in function of their generic conventions that Lizzani and Giordana manage to say anything intelligible in regards to the cinema, representation and collective memory. The relation to the past in this way is not one of recovery. The crew of *Citta Aperta* or the events and characters surrounding the death of Pasolini function as the “found object” of surrealist aesthetics, not as traces themselves (as objects) but rather as the traces of the “hands” in which they have passed. Memory thus is not found in a discovery of “how it was” but in what was desired and never became, objects that are never whole, a not yet that haunts this world: not objects but ultimately processes. Fragments of the past in which one can look for something that is salvageable.



## CHAPTER 8

As economic life restructured itself toward the end of the seventies, the urban centers sprawling to include the peripheries, the final decline of the modes of cultural consumption and resistance engendered by the popular genres and the *terza visione* came from within the media sphere. The 1976 law for television which effectively exploded the monopoly over the airwaves that RAI, the state television network, had held up to then and opened the airwaves to local privately owned channels, thus offering a different localized way of engaging with popular forms of cultural production. Many of the popular films passed to television, as the newly formed local channels found it more profitable to simply act as exhibitor rather than as producer, thus in the process giving the final blow to the production and exhibition circuits of popular genres,



television itself becoming the single most powerful and “necessary” film producer and exhibitor.

Maurizio Nichetti's Ladri di saponette (1989, The Icicle Thief) embodies many of the concerns surrounding national culture, social life, the cinema, television and the crisis of what Brunetta has termed ‘homo cinematographicus’<sup>115</sup>. As a paradigmatic text, the film is ultimately an inventive representation (and a sardonic denunciation) of the irruption of televisual flow into the nation's imaginary. As an exponent of that national film tradition -constructed as constantly under attack both from abroad (Hollywood's cultural imperialism) and from within the national boundaries (commercial television)- Nichetti's *j'accuse* , more than working as an effective condemnation of the cultural forces supposedly at work to destroy national culture, betrays its overdetermination and the clear place of power in cultural discourse from which it is speaking paradoxically –or typically as we have argued—denouncing precisely that which allows the maintenance of a hegemonic position and the containment of resistances and conflict.

Nichetti constitutes television as the “bad object” of cultural production, responsible of fragmenting the unity of the nation as it breaks the integrity of the texts representative of national identity, blaspheming the holy idea of the nation and national culture through its interruptions and segmentations. Literally caught between cinema and television, between the film and the advertisements that interrupt it, between the black and white of the national cinema and the explosion of colors in the commercials, between the past and the present, Nichetti’s characters, as they negotiate their way through the hyperreality of commercial broadcast television and the “reality” of national life, reinstate all of the oppositions on which the construction of the national cultural language of Italy is based.

Ultimately, the film exposes all of the anxieties surrounding the loss of boundaries and identity brought about by the “liberalization” of the airwaves, the irreversible passage into a national imaginary regulated by the desiring production of television, with its proliferation of symbols and meanings, its fragmented and multiple looks, as it

escapes the simple reassurances and guiding metanarrative of national collective identity. Television is seen as breaking the privileged aesthetic experience of the cinema and the integrity of the text (the cinematic, but also the national), accelerating the death of the author and blurring the distinctions between crass commercialism and high artistic production. TV takes on, not only industrially but also as ideological foil, the role of the popular genres and all the other debased forms of mass culture threatening national cohesion. Seen from another perspective, one in which the old certainties and stabilities of the nation are questioned, the place of commercial television and of its effects cannot be seen as so obvious and unambiguous.

While Italian television was continuously discussed as a paradigmatic instance of the ideological/industrial struggle between public and commercial systems<sup>116</sup>, a whole experience of the national televisual experience is systematically reduced to silence. This structuring absence in the discourses surrounding Italian television is the unprecedented proliferation of small, privately or

cooperatively owned and highly localized stations that emerged immediately following the 1976 broadcasting law which opened the airwaves at the local level and effectively broke the historical monopoly of RAI, the state owned broadcaster, and its discursive strategies aimed at imagining the nation in televisual space. Radically distinct from the subsequent emergence of the nationalized commercial networks of Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest (Mediaset today) -which effectively relied on the silencing of these experiences in order to bring to completion its monopolistic takeover of the commercial broadcasting sector- the discursive spaces constructed by local broadcasting evaded the normativizing discourses surrounding Italian national culture and exposed the constructedness of that mythic homogeneous national subjectivity.

Through an analysis of the manners in which local television recuperated certain forms of popular entertainment practices -mainly generic popular film productions which were reconfigured and recontextualized in the broadcasting palimpsest- the intent here is to reflect

on how this evasion of the institutional discourses surrounding Italian national television offers ways of historicizing and theorizing the construction of different forms of subjectivities -tied to locality and class- as diverse and heterogeneous in their constitution, and “at home” with the fragmentation of the national that commercial television provided.

The project of the nation was thus placed in a state of perpetual crisis as the sense of disorientation, of disturbance of direction, of deterritorialization that the liberalization of the airwaves brought about for national discourse allowed the subsumption of differences, that had been put into place by the centralization of culture and the monolithic conception of the national subjectivity, to be questioned.

That same residual culture, relegated in the margins of the relations of production, outside processes of representation and outside of national discourse that was so fundamental in its practices of cultural consumption for the development of the genre system of Italian cinema were also

at the forefront of the development of the first local commercial broadcasters.

The international recession hits Italy in 1973 causing heavy repercussions on economic and social policy lasting for the greater part of the decade. Oddly enough, the crisis has the opposite effect on the economic assets of the degraded urban areas whose political, cultural and social dynamics are accentuated creating new forms of aggregation and socialization. The growth of this hidden sub-national level causes the formation of a more diffuse entrepreneurial and industrial formations, radically distinct from the officially sanctioned industrial powers, the oligopolies operating at the national level. Because of their marginalization, the new economic forces evaded the dominant tendencies of the national economy. Capital investment and technological development in this “sector” not only open new possibilities for immaterial work, but also change the connotations of the whole productive system of audiovisual communication, on which new social ferments, participatory pushes, structural modifications of the

economy, permissiveness and political acquiescence play a central role.

It is not therefore, as has been argued a posteriori a process of capitalist recomposition and subsumption<sup>117</sup>; on the contrary, it is an incoherent and proliferating development which at times finds itself at odds with the interests of the thrust of modernization and industrialization.

The great novelty is constituted by the interest coalescing around the possibilities offered by cable television, based on the model of the US's CATV (Community Antenna Television) which came into existence in the 1950's. As an alternative form of television, cable is thought to be the most efficacious and economic mean of confronting giant RAI. The reasoning behind this is that while RAI appeals to a mass audience, cable television can appeal to a more limited and locally circumscribed audience which is easily identifiable.

Their existence sanctioned passively thanks to the policy void in matters of telecommunications rather than

actively through the ratification of appropriate legislature, the many cable stations that started appearing between 1972 and 1974 were continuously challenged on constitutional grounds by overzealous magistrates subservient to the state monopoly's interests. The point of no return on the way to the 1975 telecommunications law is marked by the appearance of two broadcast networks who took advantage of the possibility of broadcasting officially from outside the national borders: Telecapodistria from Yugoslavia and TeleSvizzera from Switzerland. Though even these continually face challenges as their transmitters on Italian soil are shut down by court orders, the first step towards the new law is represented by a 1974 Constitutional Court decree which blocked the umpteenth shut down of the "foreign" transmitters: "The state's concession of frequencies finds its reason for being in the limited frequencies which have been reserved for Italy. Therefore, the shutting down of foreign broadcasters constitutes a clear violation of guaranteed free speech and the free circulation of ideas, thus compromising an essential aspect of democratic life."<sup>118</sup> The decree furthermore went



on to definitively legalize cable television at the local level while again reaffirming the concession of frequencies solely to the public service, RAI.

However, the legislative void still persisted. Taking advantage of this, and once the economic advantages of broadcasting over cable transmission became clear, the conversion of the existing stations into broadcasters and the entrance of new entities was unstoppable. Between 1974 and 1975 practically all cable stations disappear and the onslaught of private broadcasters is in full effect. From the first “free” broadcasters -Firenze Libera, Telesuperba, Qui Modena, Savona TV, Antenna Nord, Tivu Malta, Quinta Rete- which start programming already in 1975, the number of broadcasters increases geometrically: in 1976 there are 68 stations, in 1977 188 and by 1978 their number has risen to 434, thus bringing Italy at the top of the list of countries with the highest television stations to population ratio<sup>119</sup>.

Unsuccessful at countering the proliferation of local broadcasters through a repressive legislative action, the confrontation with the “privates” moved to a discursive level.

As programming increased, the local broadcasters were cast as the low in a high/low dichotomy in which state television attempted to reassert its role as provider of “wholesome”, “serious” and “context driven” narratives of national life.

In fact, television permits ample possibilities for positing distinctions about its modes of address and programming in order to propose more general arguments about identification, fantasy, pleasure and ideology. It is possible to speak of these as they displayed themselves in discourse: the national, the “center”, high culture, the centers of economic power, drama, news, closure are aligned in opposition to the local, the periphery, low/popular culture, diffused economic power, comedy, gossip, openendedness. Like the tensions brought out in Nichetti’s *The Icicle Thief*, the way the cinema is presented on television on the two systems provides an elucidation of the differences.

Films on television, as they were presented on state broadcaster RAI, were the televisual event of the week. A certain day and a certain time slot was reserved weekly for the presentation of “the” film as programming was carefully

chosen and organized by “expert” film critics. Two films a week, programmed in prime time (one for each channel of the state broadcaster: Monday night on the first channel - RAI 1- and tuesday nights on the second -RAI2), usually organized around retrospectives of particular authors or actors or around certain thematics. Film programming criteria thus attempts to present of possessing an internal coherence, the same which informs the programming choices of journalistic and actuality reports. The presence of a curator-film critic in the studio which presents the films, apart from culturally nobilitating, serves to elevate the whole effort and justifying the mere programming of the film on television. The presence of entertainment is thus rhetorically justified and the films are presented as other than simple entertainment. The projected viewer of these programs is therefore constructed as possessing a high culture taste as the film comes to be presented to him (the gender specification is marked here) as a privileged aesthetic experience; a member of a cine-club to whom are offered historical and critical points of reference. Needless to say, the films run uninterruptedly, the integrity of their text

broken only by a short intermission in order to replicate the conventional theatrical experience. Commercials are not shown during intermission, rather the expert reappears on screen to provide some extra contextualization in case someone had started to stray off the “proper” interpretation. Actual choices are, predictably, made from among the “treasures” of Italian cinema, European art cinema and, much less frequently, Hollywood auteurs (from John Ford to Don Siegel, as long as an authorial voice can be distinguished). Listings on the programming guides list title, director, year and country of production,

Film programming on the “100 Flowers” -the maoist connotation given to the local/popular broadcasters come courtesy of Vittorino Mancino, Postal Minister- occupied the vast majority of scheduling hours. In order to fill up programming time -private broadcasters, differently from RAI, who stopped programming at midnight and resumed at 11am, were on-air twenty-four hours a day- cheaply and efficiently much of the programming was culled from the vast catalog of the popular cinema of Italy. Televisual space is literally invaded by thousands of films, from the most

diverse genres. There are no limits, preclusions, taboos that cannot be broken. All of the “filoni” --sex comedies, horrors, westerns, “gialli”, the peplum-- are featured around the clock on the local airwaves creating a textual continuum and flow as characters such as Er Monnezza, Maciste, Pierino, Santana lose their contours and blend one into the other, and the texts lose their closure, sprawling in both directions, facilitated not only by the constant and “irrational” interruptions of the film by commercials but also permitting for the first time the use of the remote control that had just been introduced in Italy for intertextual semiotic proliferation.

Program listings, when possible to come by, simply list “Film” and the approximate hour of programming. Viewers, like the audiences of the third run theaters in the urban peripheries, where these films had been programmed theatrically, wander into the televisual and textual space at random, switching between distraction and absorption. This is surely not the privileged aesthetic experience that the “Cinema on Tv” programs of RAI offered: the serious, closed, thematically organized and contextualized, high art

discourses of the state broadcaster are reversed into the ludic, openended, serially produced and decontextualized, generic, low art discourses of the local stations.

The local television channels, therefore, brought destabilization into the national discourses that permeated public broadcasting. Placed outside of the nationalized televisual space of RAI, the spaces of local broadcasting were accordingly constructed as sites of pleasure in which the viewing modes they elicited participated in processes which were in open contrast to the regimented viewing prescribed by the pedagogic discourses of national/state television. Local television ultimately worked –like the theaters of the third run circuits-- as sites of “heterogeneous” aggregation, of “perpetual decanonization”, bringing a carnivalesque aesthetic to the Italian airwaves. Intentionally or just as the result of the textual organization of commercial television, and because of the material base in which local television found itself operating in, the televisual programming of the popular films evaded the processes of formation of middle class identity and culture proposing, instead of the authenticating discourses of

national identity, a series of generic products that reinforced the low.

It is unfortunate that still today the discursive construction of private television (the local qualification, after the concentration of the private sector in the hands of Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest must necessarily be dropped), especially on the part of the left, is based on the same premises. The argument is that commercial broadcasting has resulted in a loss of the "traditional values" of Italian national culture as it has descended into a consumerist nightmare pushed by the tele-marketing promotions of the commercial televisions. For most political and media analysts, if Silvio Berlusconi managed to ascend to the head of the state in less than six months it is thanks to his monopolistic hold over the television market which, as common reasoning goes, informs and produces the national imaginary. These anxieties reflect a "1984" syndrome that is theoretically and politically reductive, other than being based on a naive functionalist theorization of the media and its simplistic presuppositions: the ownership of the media

determines the content and the media determine the choices, behavior and political orientation of its consumers. In this manner television is reified as a simple object of manipulation rather than being seen as the social space that it is.

Ultimately, by holding onto the metanarratives of the nation-state, these discourses attempt to hide the fact that it is the importation of the textuality and techniques of commercial television into political representation rather than the ownership of commercial television that brought Berlusconi to the forefront of the political world. As cultural conjunctures change clinging to a static notion of identity is unproductive.



**ENDNOTES:**

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<sup>1</sup> Deutsch, K., Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1966)

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1983)

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<sup>3</sup> Berman, M., All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity (London: Verso, 1983); pg. 15

<sup>4</sup>Berman (1983); pg. 345

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, B., Imagined Communities (London, U.K.: Verso, 1991)

<sup>6</sup> Hobsbawm, E.J., Nations and Nationalism Since 1788 (London: Canto, 1990). Hobsbawm has been widely critiqued for this reflection on the loss of historical efficacy of nationalism and the nation-state, many feeling that the vigor with which the national causes of the former Communist world have been taken up may point to different conclusions. However, as Gopal Balakrishnan suggests in "The National Imagination", Hobsbawm's statement is "suitably qualified to take into account the outbreak and intensification of national conflicts in such contexts." [Balakrishnan, G., "The National Imagination" in New Left Review, #211(May-June 1995); pg. 56] Balakrishnan asserts that Hobsbawm's claim that the nation-state is no longer a 'vector of historical development' means simply that "the dominant trends of state formation, immigration, and economic life in the world's most dynamic societies [are] pushing beyond familiar national dimensions." It is undeniable, in fact, that even in the face of, as they are known, "small nations" claims, the process of transformation of the world economy and the ideological formations that are being structured by material conditions have become accelerated and that the deterritorializing dynamic is most powerfully articulated through the dominant logic of globalization. The effects of the proliferating information and communication flows and the mass human migrations which concur in eroding territorial geopolitical and cultural frontiers and boundaries, provoking more immediate -through the reconfiguration of time and space- confrontations of culture and identity cannot pass unnoticed and be thought of as having no structural and long-lasting effects.

<sup>7</sup> Hansen, M., Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in the American Silent Film (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1991); pg. 60

<sup>8</sup> Hansen (1991); pg. 63

<sup>9</sup> Higson, A., "The Concept of National Cinema" in Screen 30.4 (Autumn 1989); pg. 37

<sup>10</sup>Anderson, B., "Narrating the Nation" in Times Literary Supplement (June 13, 1986); pg. 659

<sup>11</sup> Higson (1989); pg. 38

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<sup>12</sup> Higson (1989); pg. 44

<sup>13</sup> The term “borgate” has no equivalence in the English language. The term denotes a peripheric area surrounding the city which might be characterized as a cross between a slum and a suburban district composed of housing projects. The majority of new urban immigrants arriving to the urban centers of post-war Italy settled in these areas. The borgate will be discussed at greater length in the following pages.

<sup>14</sup> Rome’s population in the 1951 census was counted at 1,651,754, increasing to 2,188,160 ten years later in 1961 and reaching 2,455,302 in 1964. See Ferrarotti, F., Roma: Da Capitale a Periferia (Bari: Laterza, 1979); pg. 56

<sup>15</sup>As early as 1876, Sella, one of the most famous post-unification politicians of Italy, a “father” of the nation, had these words of caution for a possible migration of the rural masses to Rome: “I would see the agglomeration of large masses of workers in Rome as a major inconvenience, because I see this city as a place where issues must be discussed intellectually, issues which require the effort of all the intellectual forces of the nation and in which the popular impetus of large masses of workers would be out of place.” Quoted in Ferrarotti (1979); pg. 58.

<sup>16</sup>The specter of a popular revolt, primarily by the rural classes of the south, which composed the vast majority of urban immigrants, is still being agitated in the discourses of Italian politics.

<sup>17</sup> Harvey, D., The Urban Experience (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989)

<sup>18</sup> Insolera, I., Roma Moderna: Un secolo di storia urbanistica (Torino: Einaudi, 1971)

<sup>19</sup>Morley, D. and Robins, K., “No Place Like Heimat : Images of Home(Land) in European Culture” in New Formations, #12 (Winter, 1990); pg. 6

<sup>20</sup>Stallybrass, P. and White, A., The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986); pg. 11

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, M., “Of Other Spaces” in Diacritics (Spring 1986)

<sup>22</sup> Foucault (1986); pg. 24

<sup>23</sup> Schlesinger, P., Media, State and Nation (London: Sage, 1991); p. 141

<sup>24</sup> Schlesinger (1991); pg. 144

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<sup>25</sup> This is a constant refrain in Armand Mattelart's work. See his introduction in Mattelart, A. & Siegelau, S., Communication and Class Struggle, Vol.1: Capitalism, Imperialism (New York, NY International General 1979) but also in more recent work these concepts are touched upon regularly: Mattelart, A., Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture (Minneapolis, Mn: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) as well as Mattelart, A. & Mattelart, M., Rethinking Media Theory: Signposts and New Directions (Minneapolis, Mn: University of Minnesota Press, 1992)

<sup>26</sup> Anderson (1991): in Chapter 2 "Cultural Roots": continuity with religious modes of thought and a way of coping/disavowing/celebrating what Marshall Berman defines as the "maelstrom" brought about by/ of modernity; in Chapter 3, "The Origins of National Consciousness": the emergence of the printing press and print capitalism and the loss in authority of the "truth languages" in favor of the "languages of power" and the emergence of "official nationalisms"; in Chapter 4, "Creole Pioneers": the global roots of European nationalism and the development of a sense of the nation in the Americas before European nationalism as well as anti-colonial nationalism in Indonesia, the Philippines.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson (1991); pg. 7

<sup>28</sup> Renan, "What is a Nation?" cited in Anderson (1991), pg. 6

<sup>29</sup> Gellner, Thought and Change cited in Anderson (1991), pg. 6

<sup>30</sup> Anderson (1991); pg. 6

<sup>31</sup> Anderson's distinction is critiqued by Philip Schlesinger in Media, State and Nation (pg. 163)

<sup>32</sup> Anderson (1991); pg. 7 et passim

<sup>33</sup> Anderson (1991); pg. 149

<sup>34</sup> Hroch, M., "From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe" in New Left Review; #198 (March/April 1993); pp. 3-20

<sup>35</sup> Hroch (1993); pg. 8 - Emphasis is mine.

<sup>36</sup> Gellner, E., Nations and Nationalism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); p.37-38

<sup>37</sup> Anderson (1991); pg. 210

<sup>38</sup> Hansen (1991); pg. 27

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, M., The Archeology of Knowledge (London, UK: Routledge, 1989)

<sup>40</sup> White, H., The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987)

<sup>41</sup> De Certeau, M., The Writing of History (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988)

<sup>42</sup> Sorlin, P., The Film in History: Restaging the Past (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1980)

<sup>43</sup> Sorlin, P., Sociologie du cinema: ouverture pour l'histoire de demain (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1992)

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<sup>44</sup> Sorlin, P., European Cinema, European Societies, 1939-1990 (London: UK: Routledge, 1991)

<sup>45</sup> Lagny, M., Ropars, MC., Sorling, P., Générique des années 30 (Paris: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1986)

<sup>46</sup> Kracauer, S., From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947)

<sup>47</sup> Ferro, M., Cinema and History (Detroit, Mi: Wayne State University, 1988)

<sup>48</sup> An important way of understanding the type of analysis called for by Sorlin might be the adaptation of the work done by Roland Barthes in S/Z. Through the engagement of the text and breaking it up in terms of its structures of meaningfulness Barthes deconstructs Balzac's novel, pushing the possibilities that the text allows for creating meaning to its most extreme. Barthes' conceptualization of "connotation" is quite important in respects to how texts produce meanings in their contemporaneity: distinguishing between "connotation" and "association of ideas" he explains how the first represents the secondary meanings which come out of the denotative meanings of the text, produced by relating the various codes of the text and from inter-textual references. The difference with "association of ideas" on the other hand is given by the fact that this latter refers to the system of the subject (the reader or spectator in film) while "connotation" refers to the system of the text. As a way into the "polysemy" of the classical text, "connotation" as conceptualized by Barthes opens a fruitful way for analyzing a film text in its contemporaneity as the meanings produced must necessarily be reflected in the present of the text rather than in the present of the "reader". Barthes also notes how it is important to take the specificity of the medium when reflecting and elaborating on the codes of a text.

<sup>49</sup> The interview/roundtable is included in Wilson, D.(ed), Cahiers du Cinema, Vol. 4: 1973-1978: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle (London, UK: Routledge, 2000) as "Anti-Retro"; pg. 159-172. It is discussed at length also in Maniglier & Zabunyan, Foucault va au cinema (Paris, France: Bayard, 2011)

<sup>50</sup> Benveniste, E., Problems in General Linguistics (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971)

<sup>51</sup> This may be a useful way to counter-act the homogenization assumed by theorists of nationalism when they discuss media in nationalism. All messages of nationalism do not necessarily overlap neatly, and may create disruptive spaces between them.

<sup>52</sup> Rosenstone, R., Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) Also, Rosenstone, R., Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1998)

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<sup>53</sup> Parker, A. et al, Nationalisms and Sexualities (London, UK: Routledge, 1992)

<sup>54</sup> At the risk of being tedious, I'd just like to point out that though this makes it sound as if the nation were a self-willing and intentional agency, I do see it as composed of people and institutions combating to define it.

<sup>55</sup> Nairn, T., Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited (London, UK: Verso, 1997)

<sup>56</sup> Bhabha, H., Nation and Narration (London, UK: Routledge, 1990)

<sup>57</sup> Kaes, A., From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History As Film (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1989)

<sup>58</sup> "Gypsies", "zingari" in the original Italian are truly the discursive Other of popular identity –marked by rootlessness, unproductivity, true models for the 'hoardes' of the borgate.

<sup>59</sup> Things change with the arrival of Erik in the company and his outsider role is further reinforced through his liminal class positioning, in between the old order of the Count (he was an officer in the army while Bruno a simple soldier) and the new order of the troupe which he joins. Erik's social positioning is in fact ambiguous but if read in terms of the historical conjuncture of Italy during the early sixties and the emergence of a new form of agreement between students and the working class which would then explode in the '68 movement, the figure of Erik acquires some coherence.

<sup>60</sup> To further emphasize her occupying a space in between the "witch" is embodied in a recognizably masculine body, played by Donald Sutherland. Although this possibility of the same actor embodying different characters in a representation is a solution often used in the "commedia dell'arte" and in "variety vaudeville", and the film does play with this aspect, the fact that the witch's role is given to a man is significant in itself.

<sup>61</sup> Foucault, M., The Archeology of Knowledge (London, UK: Routledge, 1989)

<sup>62</sup> Many analyses of film and history focus on this aspect, examining the cinematic mediations that occur in the narration of historical events. George Custen in Bio/Pics looks at the ways that Hollywood produced public history in the studio-era. He is interested in looking at pre-television taxonomies of fame in Hollywood, and identifies many determinants, such as: the star-system (as every studio--except for Universal--had its own stars and could only dramatize those lives for whom it had an appropriate star-actor); Hollywood's own history (Pre-40's there were many Disraelis and Lincolns while post-40s there were primarily bio/pics of entertainers; this could be because of color, popularity of musicals, or Hollywood justifying its own existence); and generic patterns of bio/pics (the condensed trial scene, the montage about their struggle). Leger Grindin, in Shadows of the Past sees the conflict between the individual and the society as one of the animating

conflicts of historical narratives, and one of the ways in which it presents the lives of individuals yet aims to transcend it to larger extra-personal themes. Shohat and Stam in Unthinking Eurocentrism analyze imperial tropes and the western as an imperial paradigm, while Gina Marchetti, in Romance and the Yellow Peril examines the overlaying of the orientalism of "Hollywood's Asia" with the portrayal of miscegenation. She uses Levi-Strauss' notion that narratives often take real conflicts and, in working out their resolution, symbolically reconcile them. Thus narratives of rape, of captivity (of the white woman by the Asian), of sacrifice (of the Asian woman to maintain the hegemony of the white) are all seen as symbolically reconciling the America that promises to be liberal melting pot with the white hegemonic America, by fulfilling the fantasies of the latter in varying degrees.

<sup>63</sup> Jameson posits this as a historical necessity, if not an essential one. In The Political Unconscious he brings up the example of France (the political milieu in which Althusser wrote) and the homogenizing and totalizing role that the PCF (the French Communist Party) had in shaping the debates and its intersections with the so-called "problem of Stalin". Jameson does not see the same need to explode the totality and assert the fragmentary in social relations in the US, where he sees the necessity of a united struggle against the totality that he wishes to set up. Read in this sense then, the push for the idea of mediation and for the recognition of some form of totality assumes relevance only in view of political practice and strategy and therefore even Jameson's characterization cannot posit some form of "absolute" totality. Jameson is thus positing some sort of an ethos for Marxist analysis rather than an attempt of securing his discursive construction of the "real" absolutely. Jameson's then becomes a form of "political desire" which is not outside of the ideas of overdetermination, the absence of an "objective" totality and the "mediation" that cultural texts perform. The "transcoding" that Jameson posits is therefore recognized as a "political strategy" in order to organize the consciousness and the practice of historical agents. The importance of this will be assessed later in the chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Althusser, L., Lenin and Philosophy, and other essays (New York, NY: Monthly Review Pree, 1971)

<sup>65</sup> Gramsci, A. [Forgacs, D. and Nowell-Smith, G. (eds.)], Selections From Cultural Writings (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Pree, 1985)

<sup>66</sup> Bourdieu, P., Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

<sup>67</sup> To the point of sounding petulant what I mean with "historically determined" is always a form of "overdetermination" where no single process or structure can be identified as determining "in the last instance".

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<sup>68</sup> The existence of such "class languages, in a much more nuanced and theorized form is also found in Jameson's writings, even though he characterizes it as a "totality" in terms of the "content of the form" that a dominant aesthetic imposes on cultural texts. Jameson identifies in "realism" the revolutionary aesthetic of the bourgeois revolution itself (as did Lukacs, for example). How can one reconcile such a historical notion of "realism" with the "preoccupation with nature" as an ahistorical category understood by Bourdieu? Jameson posits "realism" as the dominant aesthetic form of an emerging hegemonic class. Is Bourdieu's political championing of working class aesthetics based on the idealism that "realism" necessarily points to an emerging hegemonic class which he wishes to see in the working class?

<sup>69</sup> Brantlinger, P., Bread & Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983)

<sup>70</sup> Ginzburg, C., The Cheese and the Worms (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980)

<sup>71</sup> Honneth, A., The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995)

<sup>72</sup> Habermas, J., The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol.2: The Critique of Functionalist Reason (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989)

<sup>73</sup> Haberman, J., The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1989)

<sup>74</sup> Honneth, A., La société du mépris: Vers une nouvelle Théorie critique (Paris: La Decouverte, 2006)

<sup>75</sup> Haberman, J., L'Espace public. Archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise (Paris; Payot, coll. Critique de la Politique, 1992/1993); pg. VI

<sup>76</sup> Negt, O. & Kluge, A., Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere (Minneapolis, Mn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

<sup>77</sup> The concept of the clean and proper self if introduced by Julia Kristeva in La révolution du langage poétique (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974) [translated as Revolution in Poetic Language (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1984)] and further elaborated in Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Subject and the Other: Alienation" in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis (New York, N.Y.: WW Norton and Co., 1978); pp. 203-215

<sup>79</sup> Kristeva (1982); pg. 62

<sup>80</sup> Kristeva (1982); pg. 65



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<sup>81</sup> Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge, 1966)

<sup>82</sup> Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F., Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1983)

<sup>83</sup> Kristeva (1982); pg. 8

<sup>84</sup> Douglas (1966); pg. 70

<sup>85</sup> Kristeva (1982); pg. 67

<sup>86</sup> Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" in Diacritics (Spring 1986); pp. 22-27

<sup>87</sup> Foucault (1986); pg. 24

<sup>88</sup> Foucault (1986); pg. 24

<sup>89</sup> David Harvey, Consciousness and the Urban Experience (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); pg. 251

<sup>90</sup> By mid decade the once all powerful force of the circuit of theaters controlled by the church had begun its slow demise, even if some theaters remained active well into the mid-seventies.

<sup>91</sup> One cannot but remark here in passing even though the question is fundamental that neo-realism as the ur form of Italian national cinema sees its development marked and its very essence defined by the practical and political consequences of the destruction and devastation of the war. A destruction and devastation that was not only infrastructural and technological but invested the very 'image' of the nation itself.

<sup>92</sup> Brunetta, Vol. IV (1993); pg. 97

<sup>93</sup> These are also the final years of the viability of the neo-realist project, as the form enters –depending on the different theorizations adopted—either a terminal crisis or a productive transformation that will blossom into the art cinema of the 'great' modernist auteurs. In any case the end/transformation of the neo-realist form is just as much tied to the shift in the social context. As Cesare Zavattini, screenwriter for a number of neo-realist films among them De Sica's *Bicycle Thief* (1948) and Umberto D (1955) –this last one considered to be the final and most austere film to come out of the canon—"Neo-realism died when Italians stopped taking public transportation" thus linking this epochal shift which will result in the development of the film industry and film going practices that we are interested in analyzing here with the appearance of the urban mobility afforded by the automobile.

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<sup>94</sup> Wagstaff, C., "A Forkful of Westerns" in Dyer, R. and Vincendeau, G., *Popular European Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992); pg. 248

<sup>95</sup> Wagstaff (1992); pg. 251

<sup>96</sup> Koven, M.J., *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2006); pg. 29

<sup>97</sup> Wagstaff (1992); pg. 253

<sup>98</sup> Bataille, G., "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (Minneapolis, Mn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); pg. 137-160

In "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" Georges Bataille identifies productive society as "homogeneous" to which he opposes "elements which are impossible to assimilate", distinguishing these as "heterogenous." The "heterogenous world" includes "everything resulting from unproductive expenditure[...]. This consists of everything rejected by homogenous society as waste or as superior transcendent value. Included are the waste products of the human body and certain analogous matter (trash, vermin, etc.); the parts of the body; persons, words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value; the various unconscious processes such as dreams or neuroses; the numerous elements or social forms that homogenous society is powerless to assimilate."

<sup>99</sup> Bakhtin, M., *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1984)

<sup>100</sup> Stam, R., *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); pg. 95

<sup>101</sup> Bourdieu, P., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1984); pg. 491

<sup>102</sup> Stam (1989); pg. 110

<sup>103</sup> Brunetta, G.P., *Storia del Cinema Italiano: Dal Miracolo Economico agli Anni Novanta; 1960-1993/Vol. IV* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1993); pg. 423

<sup>104</sup> *Il Messaggero*, Rome (December 31, 1974); pg. 7

<sup>105</sup> Altman, R., *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999) and particularly Grant, B.K., *Film Genre Reader* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 1986) for Rick Altman's "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre"

<sup>106</sup> Jameson, F., *Signatures of the Visible* (London, UK: Routledge, 1990)

<sup>107</sup> Bennett, T., "Texts in History: The Determinations of Readings and Their Texts" in *The Journal of the Midwest MLA*, Vol. 18, #1 (Spring 1985); pp. 1-16

<sup>108</sup> Derrida, J., "The Law of Genre" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, #1 (Autumn 1980); pp. 55-81

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<sup>109</sup> Newman, K., "Thirty Years In Another Town: The History of Italian Exploitation" in Monthly Film Bulletin, vol. 53, #624-626; 1986.

<sup>110</sup> Daney, S., "Il était une fois dans l'Ouest" in Cahiers du Cinema #216 (October 1969) reprinted in Daney, S., La maison cinéma et le monde, Vol. 1: Le temps des Cahiers, 1962-1981 (Paris: POL, 2001); pg. 104-105

<sup>111</sup> Brunetta, pg. 501 et passim. See also Scarpellini, E., Material Nation: A Consumer's History of Modern Italy (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011) as well as Gundle, S., Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991 (Duke University Press, 2000)

<sup>112</sup> Tafuri, M., Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1976)

<sup>113</sup> Terdiman, R., Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis (Ithaca: NY: Cornell University Press)

<sup>114</sup> The historiographic debate is discussed in Chapter 3 and is relevant to the following reading.

<sup>115</sup> Brunetta,

<sup>116</sup> We will avoid discussion of the overt disfunction of the system as it presents itself today.

<sup>117</sup> Much of the work done by the operaismo movement from a Marxist perspective while suggestive at a political and industrial level fail to account for the cultural dimension of the radical changes and transformations that were transforming the social fabric of the nation.

<sup>118</sup> Maestri, G., "Il pluralismo nel sistema radiotelevisivo italiano"; Franceschielli, V., "Il superamento del monopolio statale radiotelevisivo nella giurisprudenza della Corte Costituzionale" <http://servizi2.economia.unimib.it/bacheca/Users/A1BE8FD5A2ED7945ABEC175700B42344/pdf/Sintesi%20decisioni%20Corte%20Cos%20su%20TV.pdf>

<sup>119</sup> Grasso, A., Storia della televisione italiana (Milano: Garzanti, 1992); McQuail, D., Mazzoleni, G.P. et al, The Media in Europe (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004)

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